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THE OMNIBUS OF CRIME

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Edited by

DOROTHY L. SAYERS

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INTRODUCTION

The art of self-tormenting is an ancient one, with a long and honourable literary tradition. Man, not satisfied with the mental confusion and unhappiness to be derived from contemplating the cruelties of life and the riddle of the universe, delights to occupy his leisure moments with puzzles and bugaboos. The pages of every magazine and newspaper swarm with cross-words, mathematical tricks, puzzle-pictures, enigmas, acrostics, and detective-stories, as also with stories of the kind called "powerful" (which means unpleasant), and those which make him afraid to go to bed. It may be that in them he finds a sort of catharsis or purging of his fears and self-questionings. These mysteries made only to be solved, these horrors which he knows to be mere figments of the creative brain, comfort him by subtly persuading that life is a mystery which death will solve, and whose horrors will pass away as a tale that is told. Or it may be merely that his animal faculties of fear and inquisitiveness demand more exercise than the daily round affords. Or it may be pure perversity. The fact remains that if you search the second-hand bookstalls for his cast-off literature, you will find fewer mystery stories than any other kind of book. Theology and poetry, philosophy and numismatics, love-stories and biography, he discards as easily as old razor-blades, but Sherlock Holmes and Wilkie Collins are cherished and read and re-read, till their covers fall off and their pages crumble to fragments.

Both the detective-story proper and the pure tale of horror are very ancient in origin. All native folk-lore has its ghost tales, while the first four detective-stories in this book hail respectively from the Jewish Apocrypha, Herodotus, and the Æneid. But, whereas the tale of horror has flourished in practically every age and country, the detective-story has had a spasmodic history, appearing here and there in faint, tentative sketches and episodes, until it suddenly burst into magnificent flower in the middle of the last century.

Early History of Detective Fiction

Between 1840 and 1845 the wayward genius of Edgar Allan Poe (himself a past-master of the horrible) produced five tales, in which the general principles of the detective-story were laid down for ever. In *The Murders in the Rue Morgue* and, with a certain repulsive facetiousness, in *Thou Art the Man* he achieved the fusion of the two distinct genres and created what we may call the story of mystery, as distinct from pure detection on the one hand and pure horror on the other. In this fused genre, the reader's blood is first curdled by

some horrible and apparently inexplicable murder or portent; the machinery of detection is then brought in to solve the mystery and punish the murderer. Since Poe's time all three branches—detection, mystery, and horror—have flourished. We have such pleasant little puzzles as Conan Doyle's *Case of Identity*, in which there is nothing to shock or horrify; we have mere fantasies of blood and terror—human, as in Conan Doyle's *The Case of Lady Sannox*,[1] or supernatural, as in Marion Crawford's *The Upper Berth*;[2] most satisfactory of all, perhaps, we have such fusions as *The Speckled Band*,[3] or *The Hammer of God*,[4] in which the ghostly terror is invoked only to be dispelled.

It is rather puzzling that the detective-story should have had to wait so long to find a serious exponent. Having started so well, why did it not develop earlier? The Oriental races, with their keen appreciation of intellectual subtlety, should surely have evolved it. The germ was there. "Why do you not come to pay your respects to me?" says Æsop's lion to the fox. "I beg your Majesty's pardon," says the fox, "but I noticed the track of the animals that have already come to you; and, while I see many hoof-marks going in, I see none coming out. Till the animals that have entered your cave come out again, I prefer to remain in the open air." Sherlock Holmes could not have reasoned more lucidly from the premises.

Cacus the robber, be it noted, was apparently the first criminal to use the device of forged footprints to mislead the pursuer, though it is a long development from his primitive methods to the horses shod with cow-shoes in Conan Doyle's *Adventure of the Priory School*.[5] Hercules's methods of investigation, too, were rather of the rough and ready sort, though the reader will not fail to observe that this early detective was accorded divine honours by his grateful clients.

The Jews, with their strongly moral preoccupation, were, as our two Apocryphal stories show, peculiarly fitted to produce the *roman policier*.[6] The Romans, logical and given to law-making, might have been expected to do something with it, but they did not. In one of the folk-tales collected by the Grimms, twelve maidens disguised as men are set to walk across a floor strewn with peas, in the hope that their shuffling feminine tread will betray them; the maidens are, however, warned, and baffle the detectives by treading firmly. In an Indian folk-tale a similar ruse is more successful. Here a suitor is disguised as a woman, and has to be picked out from the women about him by the wise princess. The princess throws a lemon to each in turn, and the disguised man is detected by his instinctive action in clapping his knees together to catch the lemon, whereas the real

[1] Conan Doyle: *Round the Red Lamp*.
[2] Marion Crawford: *Uncanny Tales*.
[3] Conan Doyle: *Adventures of Sherlock Holmes*.
[4] G. K. Chesterton: *The Innocence of Father Brown*.
[5] Conan Doyle: *The Return of Sherlock Holmes*.
[6] In *Bel and the Dragon* the science of deduction from material clues, in the popular Scotland Yard manner, is reduced to its simplest expression. *Susanna*, on the other hand, may be taken as foreshadowing the Gallic method of eliciting the truth by the confrontation of witnesses.

women spread their knees to catch it in their skirts. Coming down to later European literature, we find the *Bel-and-the-Dragon* motif of the ashes spread on the floor reproduced in the story of Tristan. Here the king's spy spreads flour between Tristan's bed and that of Iseult; Tristan defeats the scheme by leaping from one bed to the other. The eighteenth century also contributed at least one outstanding example, in the famous detective chapter of Voltaire's *Zadig*.

It may be, as Mr. E. M. Wrong has suggested in a brilliant little study,[7] that throughout this early period "a faulty law of evidence was to blame, for detectives cannot flourish until the public has an idea of what constitutes proof, and while a common criminal procedure is arrest, torture, confession, and death." One may go further, and say that, though crime stories might, and did, flourish, the detective-story proper could not do so until public sympathy had veered round to the side of law and order. It will be noticed that, on the whole, the tendency in early crime-literature is to admire the cunning and astuteness of the criminal.[8] This must be so while the law is arbitrary, oppressive, and brutally administered.

We may note that, even to-day, the full blossoming of the detective-stories is found among the Anglo-Saxon races. It is notorious that an English crowd tends to side with the policeman in a row. The British legal code, with its tradition of "sportsmanship" and "fair play for the criminal" is particularly favourable to the production of detective fiction, allowing, as it does, sufficient rope to the quarry to provide a ding-dong chase, rich in up-and-down incident. In France, also, though the street policeman is less honoured than in England, the detective-force is admirably organised and greatly looked up to. France has a good output of detective-stories, though considerably smaller than that of the English-speaking races. In the Southern States of Europe the law is less loved and the detective story less frequent. We may not unreasonably trace a connection here.

Some further light is thrown on the question by a remark made by Herr Lion Feuchtwanger when broadcasting during his visit to London in 1927. Contrasting the tastes of the English, French, and German publics, he noted the great attention paid by the Englishman to the external details of men and things. The Englishman likes material exactness in the books he reads; the German and the Frenchman, in different degrees, care little for it in comparison with psychological truth. It is hardly surprising, then, that the detective-story, with its insistence on footprints, bloodstains, dates, times, and places, and its reduction of character-drawing to bold, flat outline, should appeal far more strongly to Anglo-Saxon taste than to that of France or Germany.

Taking these two factors together, we begin to see why the detective-story had to wait for its full development for the establishment of an effective police organisation in the Anglo-Saxon countries. This was achieved—in England, at

[7] Preface to *Tales of Crime and Detection*. World's Classics. (Oxford University Press, 1924.)

[8] e.g. *The Story of Rhampsinitus; Jacob and Esau; Reynard the Fox; Ballads of Robin Hood*, etc.

any rate—during the early part of the nineteenth century,[9] and was followed about the middle of that century by the first outstanding examples of the detective-story as we know it to-day.[10]

To this argument we may add another. In the nineteenth century the vast, unexplored limits of the world began to shrink at an amazing and unprecedented rate. The electric telegraph circled the globe; railways brought remote villages into touch with civilisation; photographs made known to the stay-at-homes the marvels of foreign landscapes, customs, and animals; science reduced seeming miracles to mechanical marvels; popular education and improved policing made town and country safer for the common man than they had ever been. In place of the adventurer and the knight errant, popular imagination hailed the doctor, the scientist, and the policeman as saviours and protectors. But if one could no longer hunt the manticora, one could still hunt the murderer; if the armed escort had grown less necessary, yet one still needed the analyst to frustrate the wiles of the poisoner; from this point of view, the detective steps into his right place as the protector of the weak—the latest of the popular heroes, the true successor of Roland and Lancelot.

Edgar Allan Poe: Evolution of the Detective

Before tracing further the history of detective fiction, let us look a little more closely at those five tales of Poe's, in which so much of the future development is anticipated. Probably the first thing that strikes us is that Poe has struck out at a blow the formal outline on which a large section of detective fiction has been built up. In the three Dupin stories, one of which figures in the present collection, we have the formula of the eccentric and brilliant private detective whose doings are chronicled by an admiring and thickheaded friend. From Dupin and his unnamed chronicler springs a long and distinguished line: Sherlock Holmes and his Watson; Martin Hewitt and his Brett; Raffles and his Bunny (on the criminal side of the business, but of the same breed); Thorndyke and his various Jardines, Ansteys, and Jervises; Hanaud and his Mr. Ricardo; Poirot and his Captain Hastings: Philo Vance and his Van Dine. It is not surprising that this formula should have been used so largely, for it is obviously a

[9] In a letter to W. Thornbury, dated February 18, 1862, Dickens says: "The Bow Street Runners ceased out of the land soon after the introduction of the new police. I remember them very well. . . . They kept company with thieves and such-like, much more than the detective police do. I don't know what their pay was, but I have no doubt their principal complements were got under the rose. It was a very slack institution, and its head-quarters were the Brown Bear, in Bow Street, a public house of more than doubtful reputation, opposite the police-office." The first "peelers" were established in 1829.

[10] The significance of footprints, and the necessity for scientific care in the checking of alibis, were understood at quite an early date, though, in the absence of an efficient detective police, investigations were usually carried out by private persons at the instigation of the coroner. A remarkable case, which reads like a Freeman Wills Crofts novel, was that of R. *v.* Thornton (1818).

very convenient one for the writer. For one thing, the admiring satellite may utter expressions of eulogy which would be unbecoming in the mouth of the author, gaping at his own colossal intellect. Again, the reader, even if he is not, in R. L. Stevenson's phrase, "always a man of such vastly greater ingenuity than the writer," is usually a little more ingenious than Watson. He sees a little further through the brick wall; he pierces, to some extent, the cloud of mystification with which the detective envelops himself. "Aha!" he says to himself, "the average reader is supposed to see no further than Watson. But the author has not reckoned with me. I am one too many for him." He is deluded. It is all a device of the writer's for flattering him and putting him on good terms with himself. For though the reader likes to be mystified, he also likes to say, "I told you so," and "I spotted that." And this leads us to the third great advantage of the Holmes-Watson convention: by describing the clues as presented to the dim eyes and bemused mind of Watson, the author is enabled to preserve a spurious appearance of frankness, while keeping to himself the special knowledge on which the interpretation of those clues depends. This is a question of paramount importance, involving the whole artistic ethic of the detective-story. We shall return to it later. For the moment, let us consider a few other interesting types and formulæ which make their first appearance in Poe.

The personality of Dupin is eccentric, and for several literary generations eccentricity was highly fashionable among detective heroes. Dupin, we are informed, had a habit of living behind closed shutters, illumined by "a couple of tapers which, strongly perfumed, threw out only the ghastliest and feeblest of rays." From this stronghold he issued by night, to promenade the streets and enjoy the "infinity of mental excitement" afforded by quiet observation. He was also given to startling his friends by analysing their thought-processes, and he had a rooted contempt for the methods of the police.

Sherlock Holmes modelled himself to a large extent upon Dupin, substituting cocaine for candlelight, with accompaniments of shag and fiddle-playing. He is a more human and endearing figure than Dupin, and has earned as his reward the supreme honour which literature has to bestow—the secular equivalent of canonisation. He has passed into the language. He also started a tradition of his own—the hawk-faced tradition, which for many years dominated detective fiction.

So strong, indeed, was this domination that subsequent notable eccentrics have displayed their eccentricities chiefly by escaping from it. "Nothing," we are told, "could have been less like the traditional detective than"—so-and-so. He may be elderly and decrepit, like Baroness Orczy's Old Man in the Corner, whose characteristic habit is the continual knotting of string. Or he may be round and innocent-looking, like Father Brown or Poirot. There is Sax Rohmer's Moris Klaw,[11] with his bald, scholarly forehead; he irrigates his wits with a verbena spray, and carries about with him an "odically-sterilised" cushion to promote psychic intuition. There is the great Dr. Thorndyke, probably the handsomest detective in fiction; he is outwardly bonhomous, but spiritually de-

11 Sax Rohmer: *The Dream Detective.*

tached, and his emblem is the green research-case, filled with miniature microscopes and scientific implements. Max Carrados has the distinction of being blind; Old Ebbie wears a rabbit-skin waistcoat; Lord Peter Wimsey (if I may refer to him without immodesty) indulges in the buying of incunabula and has a pretty taste in wines and haberdashery. By a final twist of the tradition, which brings the wheel full circle, there is a strong modern tendency to produce detectives remarkable for their ordinariness; they may be well-bred walking gentlemen, like A. A. Milne's Anthony Gillingham, or journalists, like Gaston Leroux's Rouletabille, or they may even be policemen, like Freeman Wills Crofts' Inspector French, or the heroes of Mr. A. J. Rees's sound and well-planned stories.[12]

There have also been a few women detectives,[13] but on the whole, they have not been very successful. In order to justify their choice of sex, they are obliged to be so irritatingly intuitive as to destroy that quiet enjoyment of the logical which we look for in our detective reading. Or else they are active and courageous, and insist on walking into physical danger and hampering the men engaged on the job. Marriage, also, looms too large in their view of life; which is not surprising, for they are all young and beautiful. Why these charming creatures should be able to tackle abstruse problems at the age of twenty-one or thereabouts, while the male detectives are usually content to wait till their thirties or forties before setting up as experts, it is hard to say. Where do they pick up their worldly knowledge? Not from personal experience, for they are always immaculate as the driven snow. Presumably it is all intuition.

Better use has been made of women in books where the detecting is strictly amateur—done, that is, by members of the family or house-party themselves, and not by a private consultant. Evelyn Humblethorne[14] is a detective of this kind, and so is Joan Cowper, in *The Brooklyn Murders*.[15] But the really brilliant woman detective has yet to be created.[16]

While on this subject, we must not forget the curious and interesting development of detective fiction which has produced the *Adventures of Sexton Blake*, and other allied cycles. This is the Holmes tradition, adapted for the reading of the board-school boy and crossed with the Buffalo Bill adventure type. The books are written by a syndicate of authors, each one of whom uses a set of

[12] A. J. Rees: *The Shrieking Pit; The Hand in the Dark;* (with J. R. Watson) *The Hampstead Mystery; The Mystery of the Downs,* etc. Messrs. Rees and Watson write of police affairs with the accuracy born of inside knowledge, but commendably avoid the dullness which is apt to result from a too-faithful description of correct official procedure.

[13] e.g. Anna Katherine Green: *The Golden Slipper;* Baroness Orczy: *Lady Molly of Scotland Yard;* G. R. Sims: *Dorcas Dene;* Valentine: *The Adjusters;* Richard Marsh: *Judith Lee;* Arthur B. Reeve: *Constance Dunlop;* etc.

[14] Lord Gorell: *In the Night.*

[15] G. D. H. & M. Cole.

[16] Wilkie Collins—who was curiously fascinated by the "strong-minded" woman—made two attempts at the woman detective in *No Name* and *The Law and the Lady.* The spirit of the time was, however, too powerful to allow these attempts to be altogether successful.

characters of his own invention, grouped about a central and traditional group consisting of Sexton Blake and his boy assistant, Tinker, their comic landlady Mrs. Bardell, and their bulldog Pedro. As might be expected, the quality of the writing and the detective methods employed vary considerably from one author to another. The best specimens display extreme ingenuity, and an immense vigour and fertility in plot and incident. Nevertheless, the central types are pretty consistently preserved throughout the series. Blake and Tinker are less intuitive than Holmes, from whom however, they are directly descended, as their address in Baker Street shows. They are more careless and reckless in their methods; more given to displays of personal heroism and pugilism; more simple and human in their emotions. The really interesting point about them is that they present the nearest modern approach to a national folk-lore, conceived as the centre for a cycle of loosely connected romances in the Arthurian manner. Their significance in popular literature and education would richly repay scientific investigation.

Edgar Allan Poe: Evolution of the Plot

As regards plot also, Poe laid down a number of sound keels for the use of later adventurers. Putting aside his instructive excursions into the psychology of detection—instructive, because we can trace their influence in so many of Poe's successors down to the present day—putting these aside, and discounting that atmosphere of creepiness which Poe so successfully diffused about nearly all he wrote, we shall probably find that to us, sophisticated and trained on an intensive study of detective fiction, his plots are thin to transparency. But in Poe's day they represented a new technique. As a matter of fact, it is doubtful whether there are more than half a dozen deceptions in the mystery-monger's bag of tricks, and we shall find that Poe has got most of them, at any rate in embryo.

Take, first, the three Dupin stories. In *The Murders in the Rue Morgue*, an old woman and her daughter are found horribly murdered in an (apparently) hermetically sealed room. An innocent person is arrested by the police. Dupin proves that the police have failed to discover one mode of entrance to the room, and deduces from a number of observations that the "murder" was committed by a huge ape. Here is, then, a combination of three typical motifs: the wrongly suspected man, to whom all the superficial evidence (motive, access, etc.) points; the hermetically sealed death-chamber (still a favourite central theme); finally, the *solution by the unexpected means*. In addition, we have Dupin drawing deductions, which the police have overlooked, from the evidence of witnesses (superiority in inference), and discovering clues which the police have not thought of looking for owing to obsession by an *idée fixe* (superiority in observation based on inference). In this story also are enunciated for the first time those two great aphorisms of detective science: first, that when you have eliminated all the impossibilities, then, whatever remains, *however improbable*, must be the truth; and, secondly, that the more *outré* a case may appear, the easier it is to

solve. Indeed, take it all round, *The Murders in the Rue Morgue* constitutes in itself almost a complete manual of detective theory and practice.

In *The Purloined Letter*, we have one of those stolen documents on whose recovery hangs the peace of mind of a distinguished personage. It is not, indeed, one of the sort whose publication would spread consternation among the Chancelleries of Europe, but it is important enough. The police suspect a certain minister of taking it. They ransack every corner of his house, in vain. Dupin, arguing from his knowledge of the minister's character, decides that subtlety must be met by subtlety. He calls on the minister and discovers the letter, turned inside out and stuck in a letter-rack in full view of the casual observer.

Here we have, besides the reiteration, in inverted form,[17] of aphorism No. 2 (above), the method of *psychological deduction* and the solution by the formula of the *most obvious place*. This trick is the forerunner of the diamond concealed in the tumbler of water, the man murdered in the midst of a battle, Chesterton's *Invisible Man* (the postman, so familiar a figure that his presence goes unnoticed),[18] and a whole line of similar ingenuities.

The third Dupin story, *The Mystery of Marie Rogêt*, has fewer imitators, but is the most interesting of all to the connoisseur. It consists entirely of a series of newspaper cuttings relative to the disappearance and murder of a shopgirl, with Dupin's comments thereon. The story contains no solution of the problem, and, indeed, no formal ending—and that for a very good reason. The disappearance was a genuine one, its actual heroine being one Mary Cecilia Rogers, and the actual place New York. The newspaper cuttings, were also, *mutatis mutandis*, genuine. The paper which published Poe's article dared not publish his conclusion. Later on it was claimed that his argument was, in substance, correct; and though this claim has, I believe, been challenged of late years, Poe may, nevertheless, be ranked among the small band of mystery-writers who have put their skill in deduction to the acid test of a problem which they had not in the first place invented.[19]

Of the other Poe stories, one, *Thou Art the Man*, is very slight in theme and unpleasantly flippant in treatment. A man is murdered; a hearty person, named, with guileless cunning, Goodfellow, is very energetic in fixing the crime on a certain person. The narrator of the story makes a repulsive kind of jack-in-the-box out of the victim's corpse, and extorts a confession of guilt from—Goodfellow!

[17] "The business is very simple indeed, and I make no doubt that we can manage it sufficiently well ourselves; but then I thought Dupin would like to hear of it because it is so excessively *odd*."

"Simple and odd," said Dupin.

"Why, yes; and not exactly that either. The fact is, we have all been a good deal puzzled because the affair *is* so simple, and yet baffles us altogether."

"Perhaps it is the very simplicity of the thing which puts you at fault," said Dupin. The psychology of the matter is fully discussed in Poe's characteristic manner a few pages further on.

[18] G. K. Chesterton: *The Innocence of Father Brown*.

[19] Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's successful efforts on behalf of George Edalji and Oscar Slater deserve special mention.

Of course. Nevertheless, we have here two more leading motifs that have done overtime since Poe's day: the trail of false clues laid by the real murderer,[20] and the *solution by way of the most unlikely person.*

The fifth story is *The Gold Bug.* In this a man finds a cipher which leads him to the discovery of a hidden treasure. The cipher is of the very simple one-sign-one-letter type, and its solution, of the mark-where-the-shadow-falls-take-three-paces-to-the-east-and-dig variety. In technique this story is the exact opposite of *Marie Rogêt;* the narrator is astonished by the antics of his detective friend, and is kept in entire ignorance of what he is about until *after* the discovery of the treasure; only then is the cipher for the first time either mentioned or explained. Some people think that *The Gold Bug* is Poe's finest mystery-story.

Now, with *The Gold Bug* at the one extreme and *Marie Rogêt* at the other, and the other three stories occupying intermediate places, Poe stands at the parting of the ways for detective fiction. From him go the two great lines of development—the Romantic and the Classic, or, to use terms less abraded by ill-usage, the purely Sensational and the purely Intellectual. In the former, thrill is piled on thrill and mystification on mystification; the reader is led on from bewilderment to bewilderment, till everything is explained in a lump in the last chapter. This school is strong in dramatic incident and atmosphere; its weakness is a tendency to confusion and a dropping of links—its explanations do not always explain; it is never dull, but it is sometimes nonsense. In the other—the purely Intellectual type—the action mostly takes place in the first chapter or so; the detective then follows up quietly from clue to clue till the problem is solved, the reader accompanying the great man in his search and being allowed to try his own teeth on the material provided. The strength of this school is its analytical ingenuity; its weakness is its liability to dullness and pomposity, its mouthing over the infinitely little, and its lack of movement and emotion.

Intellectual and Sensational Lines of Development

The purely Sensational thriller is not particularly rare—we may find plenty of examples in the work of William Le Queux, Edgar Wallace, and others. The purely Intellectual is rare indeed; few writers have consistently followed the *Marie Rogêt* formula of simply spreading the *whole* evidence before the reader and leaving him to deduce the detective's conclusion from it if he can.

M. P. Shiel, indeed, did so in his trilogy, *Prince Zaleski,* whose curious and elaborate beauty recaptures in every arabesque sentence the very accent of Edgar Allen Poe. Prince Zaleski, "victim of a too importunate, too unfortunate Love, which the fulgor of the throne itself could not abash," sits apart in his ruined tower in "the semi-darkness of the very faint greenish lustre radiated from an open censer-like *lampas* in the centre of the domed encausted roof," surrounded by Flemish sepulchral brasses, runic tablets, miniature paintings, winged bulls, Tamil scriptures on lacquered leaves of the talipot, mediæval reliquaries richly

[20] See also *The Story of Susanna.*

gemmed, Brahmin gods, and Egyptian mummies, and lulled by "the low, liquid tinkling of an invisible musical-box." Like Sherlock Holmes, he indulges in a drug—"the narcotic *cannabis sativa:* the base of the *bhang* of the Mohammedans." A friend brings to him the detective problems of the outside world, which he proceeds to solve from the data given and (except in the final story) without stirring from his couch. He adorns his solutions with philosophical discourses on the social progress of mankind, all delivered with the same melancholy grace and remote intellectual disdain. The reasoning is subtle and lucid, but the crimes themselves are fantastic and incredible—a fault which these tales have in common with those of G. K. Chesterton.

Another writer who uses the *Marie Rogêt* formula is Baroness Orczy. Her *Old Man in the Corner* series is constructed precisely on those lines, and I have seen a French edition in which, when the expository part of the story is done, the reader is exhorted to: "Pause a moment and see if you can arrive at the explanation yourself, before you read the Old Man's solution." This pure puzzle is a formula which obviously has its limitations. Nearest to this among modern writers comes Freeman Wills Crofts, whose painstaking sleuths always "play fair" and display their clues to the reader as soon as they have picked them up. The intellectually minded reader can hardly demand more than this. The aim of the writer of this type of detective-story is to make the reader say at the end, neither: "Oh well, I knew it must be that all along," nor yet: "Dash it all! I couldn't be expected to guess that"; but: "Oh, of course! What a fool I was not to see it! Right under my nose all the time!" Precious tribute! How often striven for! How rarely earned!

On the whole, however, the tendency is for the modern educated public to demand fair play from the writer, and for the Sensational and Intellectual branches of the story to move further apart.

Before going further with this important question, we must look back once more to the middle of the last century, and see what development took place to bridge the gap between Dupin and Sherlock Holmes.

Poe, like a restless child, played with his new toy for a little while, and then, for some reason, wearied of it. He turned his attention to other things, and his formula lay neglected for close on forty years. Meanwhile a somewhat different type of detective-story was developing independently in Europe. In 1848 the elder Dumas, always ready to try his hand at any novel and ingenious thing, suddenly inserted into the romantic body of the *Vicomte de Bragelonne* a passage of pure scientific deduction. This passage is quite unlike anything else in the Musketeer cycle, and looks like the direct outcome of Dumas' keen interest in actual crime.[21]

But there is another literary influence which, though the fact is not generally recognised, must have been powerfully exerted at this date upon writers of mystery fiction. Between 1820 and 1850 the novels of Fenimore Cooper began to enjoy their huge popularity, and were not only widely read in America and Eng-

[21] He published a great collection of famous crimes.

land, but translated into most European languages. In *The Pathfinder*, *The Deerslayer*, *The Last of the Mohicans*, and the rest of the series, Cooper revealed to the delighted youth of two hemispheres the Red Indian's patient skill in tracking his quarry by footprints, in interrogating a broken twig, a mossy trunk, a fallen leaf. The imagination of childhood was fired; every boy wanted to be an Uncas or a Chingachgook. Novelists, not content with following and imitating Cooper on his own ground, discovered a better way, by transferring the romance of the woodland tracker to the surroundings of their native country. In the 'sixties the generation who had read Fenimore Cooper in boyhood turned, as novelists and readers, to tracing the spoor of the criminal upon their own native heath. The enthusiasm for Cooper combined magnificently with that absorbing interest in crime and detection which better methods of communication and an improved police system had made possible. While, in France, Gaboriau and Fortuné du Boisgobey concentrated upon the police novel pure and simple, English writers, still permeated by the terror and mystery of the romantic movement, and influenced by the "Newgate novel" of Bulwer and Ainsworth, perfected a more varied and imaginative genre, in which the ingenuity of the detective problem allied itself with the sombre terrors of the weird and supernatural.

The Pre-Doyle Period

Of the host of writers who attempted this form of fiction in the 'sixties and 'seventies, three may be picked out for special mention.

That voluminous writer, Mrs. Henry Wood, represents, on the whole, the melodramatic and adventurous development of the crime-story as distinct from the detective problem proper. Through *East Lynne*, crude and sentimental as it is, she exercised an enormous influence on the rank and file of sensational novelists, and at her best, she is a most admirable spinner of plots. Whether her problem concerns a missing will, a vanished heir, a murder, or a family curse, the story spins along without flagging, and, though she is a little too fond of calling in Providence to cut the knot of intrigue with the sword of coincidence, the mystery is fully and properly unravelled, in a workmanlike manner and without any loose ends. She makes frequent use of supernatural thrills. Sometimes these are explained away: a "murdered" person is seen haunting the local churchyard, and turns out never to have been killed at all. Sometimes the supernatural remains supernatural, as, for instance, the coffin-shaped appearance in *The Shadow of Ashlydyat*. Her morality is perhaps a little oppressive, but she is by no means without humour, and at times can produce a shrewd piece of characterisation.

Melodramatic, but a writer of real literary attainment, and gifted with a sombre power which has seldom been equalled in painting the ghastly and the macabre, is Sheridan Le Fanu. Like Poe, he has the gift of investing the most mechanical of plots with an atmosphere of almost unbearable horror. Take, for example, that scene in *Wylder's Hand* where the aged Uncle Lorne appears—

phantom or madman? we are not certain which—to confront the villainous Lake in the tapestried room.

"'Mark Wylder is in evil plight,' said he.

"'Is he?' said Lake with a sly scoff, though he seemed to me a good deal scared. 'We hear no complaints, however, and fancy he must be tolerably comfortable notwithstanding.'

"'You know where he is,' said Uncle Lorne.

"'Aye, in Italy; everyone knows that,' answered Lake.

"'In Italy,' said the old man reflectively, as if trying to gather up his ideas, 'Italy. . . . He has had a great tour to make. It is nearly accomplished now; when it is done, he will be like me, *humano major*. He has seen the places which you are yet to see.'

"'Nothing I should like better; particularly Italy,' said Lake.

"'Yes,' said Uncle Lorne, lifting up slowly a different finger at each name in his catalogue. 'First, Lucus Mortis; then Terra Tenebrosa; next, Tartarus; after that Terra Oblivionis; then Herebus; then Barathrum; then Gehenna, and then Stagnum Ignis.'

"'Of course,' acquiesced Lake, with an ugly sneer. . . .

"'Don't be frightened—but he's alive; I think they'll make him mad. It is a frightful plight. Two angels buried him alive in Vallombrosa by night; I saw it, standing among the lotus and hemlocks. A negro came to me, a black clergyman with white eyes, and remained beside me; and the angels imprisoned Mark; they put him on duty forty days and forty nights, with his ear to the river listening for voices; and when it was over we blessed them; and the clergyman walked with me a long while, to-and-fro, to-and-fro upon the earth, telling me the wonders of the abyss.'

"'And is it from the abyss, sir, he writes his letters?' enquired the Town Clerk, with a wink at Lake.

"'Yes, yes, very diligent; it behoves him; and his hair is always standing straight on his head for fear. But he'll be sent up again, at last, a thousand, a hundred, ten and one, black marble steps, and then it will be the other one's turn. So it was prophesied by the black magician.'"

This chapter leads immediately to those in which Larkin, the crooked attorney, discovers, by means of a little sound detective work of a purely practical sort, that Mark Wylder's letters have indeed been written "from the abyss." Mark Wylder has, in fact, been murdered, and the letters are forgeries sent abroad to be despatched by Lake's confederate from various towns in Italy. From this point we gradually learn to expect the ghastly moment when he is "sent up again at last" from the grave, in the Blackberry Dell at Gylingden.

"In the meantime the dogs continued their unaccountable yelling close by.

"'What the devil's that?' said Wealden.

"Something like a stunted, blackened branch was sticking out of the peat,

ending in a set of short, thickish twigs. This is what it seemed. The dogs were barking at it. It was, really, a human hand and arm. . . ."

In this book the detection is done by private persons, and the local police are only brought in at the end to secure the criminal. This is also the case in that extremely interesting book *Checkmate* (1870), in which the plot actually turns upon the complete alteration of the criminal's appearance by a miracle of plastic surgery. It seems amazing that more use has not been made of this device in post-war days, now that the reconstruction of faces has become comparatively common and, with the perfecting of aseptic surgery, infinitely easier than in Le Fanu's day. I can only call to mind two recent examples of this kind: one, Mr. Hopkins Moorhouse's *Gauntlet of Alceste;* the other, a short story called *The Losing of Jasper Virel,* by Beckles Willson.[22] In both stories the alterations include the tattooing of the criminal's eyes from blue to brown.

For sheer grimness and power, there is little in the literature of horror to compare with the trepanning scene in Le Fanu's *The House by the Churchyard.* Nobody who has ever read it could possibly forget that sick chamber, with the stricken man sunk in his deathly stupor; the terrified wife; the local doctor, kindly and absurd—and then the pealing of the bell, and the entry of the brilliant, brutal Dillon "in dingy splendours and a great draggled wig, with a gold-headed cane in his bony hand . . . diffusing a reek of whisky-punch, and with a case of instruments under his arm," to perform the operation. The whole scene is magnificently written, with the surgeon's muttered technicalities heard through the door, the footsteps—then the silence while the trepanning is proceeding, and the wounded Sturk's voice, which no one ever thought to hear again, raised as if from the grave to denounce his murderer. That chapter in itself would entitle Le Fanu to be called a master of mystery and horror.

Most important of all during this period we have Wilkie Collins. An extremely uneven writer, Collins is less appreciated to-day than his merits and influence deserve.[23] He will not bear comparison with Le Fanu in his treatment of the weird, though he was earnestly ambitious to succeed in this line. His style was too dry and inelastic, his mind too legal. Consider the famous dream in *Armadale,* divided into seventeen separate sections, each elaborately and successively fulfilled in laborious detail! In the curious semi-supernatural rhythm of *The Woman in White* he came nearer to genuine achievement, but, on the whole, his eerieness is wire-drawn and unconvincing. But he greatly excels Le Fanu in humour, in the cunning of his rogues,[24] in character-drawing, and especially in

[22] *Strand Magazine,* July 1909.

[23] In the British Museum catalogue only two critical studies of this celebrated English mystery-monger are listed: one is by an American, the other by a German.

[24] Collins made peculiarly his own the art of plot and counter-plot. Thus we have the magnificent duels of Marion Halcombe and Count Fosco in *The Woman in White;* Captain Wragge and Mrs. Lecount in *No Name;* the Pedgifts and Miss Gwilt in *Armadale.* Move answers to move as though on a chessboard (but very much more briskly), until the villain is manœuvred into the corner where a cunningly contrived legal checkmate has been quietly awaiting him from the beginning of the game.

the architecture of his plots. Taking everything into consideration, *The Moonstone* is probably the very finest detective story ever written. By comparison with its wide scope, its dovetailed completeness and the marvellous variety and soundness of its characterisation, modern mystery fiction looks thin and mechanical. Nothing human is perfect, but *The Moonstone* comes about as near perfection as anything of its kind can be.

In *The Moonstone* Collins used the convention of telling the story in a series of narratives from the pens of the various actors concerned. Modern realism—often too closely wedded to externals—is prejudiced against this device. It is true that, for example, Betteredge's narrative is not at all the kind of thing that a butler would be likely to write; nevertheless, it has an ideal truth—it is the kind of thing that Betteredge might think and feel, even if he could not write it. And, granted this convention of the various narratives, how admirably the characters are drawn! The pathetic figure of Rosanna Spearman, with her deformity and her warped devotion, is beautifully handled, with a freedom from sentimentality which is very remarkable. In Rachel Verinder, Collins has achieved one of the novelist's hardest tasks; he has depicted a girl who is virtuous, a gentlewoman, and really interesting, and that without the slightest exaggeration or deviation from naturalness and probability. From his preface to the book it is clear that he took especial pains with this character, and his success was so great as almost to defeat itself. Rachel is so little spectacular that we fail to realise what a singularly fine and truthful piece of work she is.

The detective part of the story is well worth attention. The figure of Sergeant Cuff is drawn with a restraint and sobriety which makes him seem a little colourless beside Holmes and Thorndyke and Carrados, but he is a very living figure. One can believe that he made a success of his rose-growing when he retired; he genuinely loved roses, whereas one can never feel that the great Sherlock possessed quite the right feeling for his bees. Being an official detective, Sergeant Cuff is bound by the etiquette of his calling. He is never really given a free hand with Rachel, and the conclusion he comes to is a wrong one. But he puts in a good piece of detective work in the matter of Rosanna and the stained nightgown; and the scenes in which his shrewdness and knowledge of human nature are contrasted with the blundering stupidity of Superintendent Seagrave read like an essay in the manner of Poe.

It is, of course, a fact that the Dupin stories had been published fifteen years or so when *The Moonstone* appeared. But there is no need to seek in them for the original of Sergeant Cuff. He had his prototype in real life, and the whole nightgown incident was modelled, with some modifications, upon a famous case of the early 'sixties—the murder of little William Kent by his sixteen-year-old sister, Constance. Those who are interested in origins will find an excellent account of the "Road murder," as it is called, in Miss Tennyson Jesse's *Murder and Its Motives*, or in Atkey's *Famous Trials of the Nineteenth Century*, and may compare the methods of Sergeant Cuff with those of the real Detective Whicher.

Wilkie Collins himself claimed that nearly all his plots were founded on fact;

indeed, this was his invariable answer when the charge of improbability was preferred against him.

> " 'I wish,' he cries angrily to a friend, 'before people make such assertions, they would think what they are writing or talking about. I know of very few instances in which fiction exceeds the probability of reality. I'll tell you where I got many of my plots from. I was in Paris, wandering about the streets with Charles Dickens, amusing ourselves by looking into the shops. We came to an old book stall—half-shop and half-store—and I found some dilapidated volumes and records of French crime—a sort of French Newgate Calendar. I said to Dickens "Here is a prize!" So it turned out to be. In them I found some of my best plots.' "[25]

Not that Collins was altogether disingenuous in his claim never to have o'erstepped the modesty of nature. While each one of his astonishing contrivances and coincidences might, taken separately, find its parallel in real life, it remains true that in cramming a whole series of such improbabilities into the course of a single story he does frequently end by staggering all belief. But even so, he was a master craftsman, whom many modern mystery-mongers might imitate to their profit. He never wastes an incident; he never leaves a loose end; no incident, however trivial on the one hand or sensational on the other, is ever introduced for the mere sake of amusement or sensation. Take, for example, the great "sensation-scene" in *No Name*, where for half an hour Magdalen sits, with the bottle of laudanum in her hand, counting the passing ships. "If, in that time, an even number passed her—the sign given should be a sign to live. If the uneven number prevailed, the end should be—death." Here, you would say, is pure sensationalism; it is a situation invented deliberately to wring tears and anguish from the heart of the reader. But you would be wrong. That bottle of laudanum is brought in because it will be wanted again, later on. In the next section of the story it is found in Magdalen's dressing-case, and this discovery, by leading her husband to suppose that she means to murder him, finally induces him to cut her out of his will, and so becomes one of the most important factors in the plot.

In *The Moonstone*, which of all his books comes nearest to being a detective-story in the modern sense, Collins uses with great effect the formula of the most unlikely person[26] and the unexpected means in conjunction. Opium is the means in this case—a drug with whose effects we are tolerably familiar to-day, but which in Collins's time was still something of an unknown quantity, de Quincey notwithstanding. In the opium of *The Moonstone* and the plastic sur-

[25] Wybert Reeve: "Recollections of Wilkie Collins," *Chambers' Journal*, Vol. IX., p. 458.

[26] Franklin Blake—the actual, though unconscious thief. By an ingenious turn, this discovery does not end the story. The diamond is still missing, and a further chase leads to the really guilty party (Godfrey Ablewhite). The character of this gentleman is enough to betray his villainy to the modern reader, though it may have seemed less repulsive to the readers in the 'sixties. His motive, however, is made less obvious, although it is quite honourably and fairly hinted at for the observant reader to guess.

gery of *Checkmate* we have the distinguished forebears of a long succession of medical and scientific mysteries which stretches down to the present day.

During the 'seventies and early 'eighties the long novel of marvel and mystery held the field, slowly unrolling its labyrinthine complexity through its three ample volumes crammed with incident and leisurely drawn characters.[27]

Sherlock Holmes and His Influence

In 1887 *A Study in Scarlet* was flung like a bombshell into the field of detective fiction, to be followed within a few short and brilliant years by the marvellous series of Sherlock Holmes short stories. The effect was electric. Conan Doyle took up the Poe formula and galvanised it into life and popularity. He cut out the elaborate psychological introductions, or restated them in crisp dialogue. He brought into prominence what Poe had only lightly touched upon—the deduction of staggering conclusions from trifling indications in the Dumas-Cooper-Gaboriau manner. He was sparkling, surprising, and short. It was the triumph of the epigram.

A comparison of the Sherlock Holmes tales with the Dupin tales shows clearly how much Doyle owed to Poe, and, at the same time, how greatly he modified Poe's style and formula. Read, for instance, the opening pages of *The Murders in the Rue Morgue*, which introduce Dupin, and compare them with the first chapter of *A Study in Scarlet*. Or merely set side by side the two passages which follow and contrast the relations between Dupin and his chronicler on the one hand, and between Holmes and Watson on the other:

> "I was astonished, too, at the vast extent of his reading; and, above all, I felt my soul enkindled within me by the wild fervour, and the vivid freshness of his imagination. Seeking in Paris the objects I then sought, I felt that the society of such a man would be to me a treasure beyond price; and this feeling I frankly confided to him. It was at length arranged that we should live together . . . and as my worldly circumstances were somewhat less embarrassed than his own, I was permitted to be at the expense of renting, and furnishing in a style which suited the rather fantastic gloom of our common temper, a time-eaten and grotesque mansion . . . in a retired and desolate portion of the Faubourg Saint Germain . . . It was a freak of fancy in my friend (for what else shall I call it?) to be enamoured of the Night for her own sake; and into this *bizarrerie*, as into all his others, I quietly fell, giving myself up to his wild whims with a perfect abandon."[28]

[27] We must not leave this period without mentioning the stories of Anna Katherine Green, of which the long series begins with *The Leavenworth Case* in 1883, and extends right down to the present day. They are genuine detective-stories, often of considerable ingenuity, but marred by an uncritical sentimentality of style and treatment which makes them difficult reading for the modern student. They are, however, important by their volume and by their influence on other American writers.

[28] *The Murders in the Rue Morgue.*

"An anomaly which often struck me in the character of my friend Sherlock Holmes was that, though in his methods of thought he was the neatest and most methodical of mankind, and although also he affected a certain quiet primness of dress, he was none the less in his personal habits one of the most untidy men that ever drove a fellow-lodger to distraction. Not that I am in the least conventional in that respect myself. The rough-and-tumble work in Afghanistan, coming on the top of a natural Bohemianism of disposition, has made me rather more lax than befits a medical man. But with me there is a limit, and when I find a man who keeps his cigars in the coal-scuttle, his tobacco in the toe-end of a Persian slipper, and his unanswered correspondence transfixed by a jack-knife into the very centre of his wooden mantelpiece, then I begin to give myself virtuous airs. I have always held, too, that pistol-practice should distinctly be an open-air pastime; and when Holmes in one of his queer humours would sit in an arm-chair, with his hair-trigger and a hundred Boxer cartridges, and proceed to adorn the opposite wall with a patriotic V.R. done in bullet-pocks, I felt strongly that neither the atmosphere nor the appearance of our room was improved by it."[29]

See how the sturdy independence of Watson adds salt and savour to the eccentricities of Holmes, and how flavourless beside it is the hero-worshipping self-abnegation of Dupin's friend. See, too, how the concrete details of daily life in Baker Street lift the story out of the fantastic and give it a solid reality. The Baker Street ménage has just that touch of humorous commonplace which appeals to British readers.

Another pair of parallel passages will be found in *The Purloined Letter* and *The Naval Treaty*. They show the two detectives in dramatic mood, surprising their friends by their solution of the mystery. In *The Adventure of the Priory School*, also, a similar situation occurs, though Holmes is here shown in a grimmer vein, rebuking wickedness in high places.

Compare, also, the conversational styles of Holmes and Dupin, and the reasons for Holmes's popularity become clearer than ever. Holmes has enriched English literature with more than one memorable aphorism and turn of speech.

"'You know my methods, Watson.'

"'A long shot, Watson—a very long shot.'

"'—a little monograph on the hundred-and-fourteen varieties of tobacco-ash.'

"'These are deep waters, Watson.'

"'Excellent!' cried Mr. Acton.—'But very superficial,' said Holmes.

"'Excellent!' I cried.—'Elementary,' said he.

"'It is of the highest importance in the art of detection to be able to recognise out of a number of facts which are incidental and which vital.'

"'You mentioned your name as if I should recognise it, but beyond the

[29] *The Musgrave Ritual.*

obvious facts that you are a bachelor, a solicitor, a Freemason and an asthmatic, I know nothing whatever about you.'

"'Every problem becomes very childish when once it is explained to you.'"

Nor must we forget that delightful form of riposto which Father Ronald Knox has wittily christened the "Sherlockismus":

"'I would call your attention to the curious incident of the dog in the night-time.'

"'The dog did nothing in the night-time.'

"'That was the curious incident.'"

So, with Sherlock Holmes, the ball—the original nucleus deposited by Edgar Allan Poe nearly forty years earlier—was at last set rolling. As it went, it swelled into a vast mass—it set off others—it became a spate—a torrent—an avalanche of mystery fiction. It is impossible to keep track of all the detective-stories produced to-day. Book upon book, magazine upon magazine pour out from the Press, crammed with murders, thefts, arsons, frauds, conspiracies, problems, puzzles, mysteries, thrills, maniacs, crooks, poisoners, forgers, garrotters, police, spies, secret-service men, detectives, until it seems that half the world must be engaged in setting riddles for the other half to solve.

The Scientific Detective

The boom began in the 'nineties, when the detective short story, till then rather neglected, strode suddenly to the front and made the pace rapidly under the ægis of Sherlock Holmes. Of particular interest is the long series which appeared under various titles from the pens of L. T. Meade and her collaborators. These struck out a line—not new, indeed, for, as we have seen, it is as old as Collins and Le Fanu, but important because it was paving the way for great developments in a scientific age—the medical mystery story. Mrs. Meade opened up this fruitful vein with *Stories from the Diary of a Doctor* in 1893,[30] and pursued it in various magazines almost without a break to *The Sorceress of the Strand*[31] in 1902. These tales range from mere records of queer cases to genuine detective-stories in which the solution has a scientific or medical foundation. During this long collaboration, the authors deal with such subjects as hypnotism, catalepsy (so-called—then a favourite disease among fiction-writers), somnambulism, lunacy, murder by the use of X-rays and hydrocyanic acid gas, and a variety of other medical and scientific discoveries and inventions.

More definitely in the Holmes tradition is the sound and excellent work of

[30] In collaboration with "Clifford Halifax."

[31] In collaboration with Robert Eustace. In these stories the scientific basis was provided by Robert Eustace, and the actual writing done, for the most part, by L. T. Meade. A more recent example of Mr. Eustace's collaboration, this time with Edgar Jepson, is *Mr. Belton's Immunity*, in the present volume.

Arthur Morrison in the "Martin Hewitt" books. Various authors such as John Oxenham and Manville Fenn also tried their hands at the detective-story, before turning to specialise in other work. We get also many lively tales of adventure and roguery, with a strong thread of detective interest, as, for example, the "African Millionaire" series by Grant Allen.

Now in the great roar and rush of enthusiasm which greeted Sherlock Holmes, the detective-story became swept away on a single current of development. We observed, in discussing the Poe tales, that there were three types of story—the Intellectual (*Marie Rogêt*), the Sensational (*The Gold Bug*), and the Mixed (*Murders in the Rue Morgue*). "Sherlock Holmes" tales, as a rule, are of the mixed type. Holmes—I regret to say it—does not always play fair with the reader. He "picks up," or "pounces upon," a "minute object," and draws a brilliant deduction from it, but the reader, however brilliant, cannot himself anticipate that deduction because he is not told what the "small object" is. It is Watson's fault, of course—Holmes, indeed, remonstrated with him on at least one occasion about his unscientific methods of narration.

An outstanding master of this "surprise" method is Melville Davisson Post. His tales are so admirably written, and his ideas so ingenious, that we fail at first reading to realise how strictly sensational they are in their method. Take, for instance, *An Act of God* from *Uncle Abner* (1911). In this tale, Uncle Abner uses the phonetic mis-spelling in a letter supposed to be written by a deaf mute to prove that the letter was not, in fact, written by him. If the text of the letter were placed before the reader, and he were given a chance to make his deduction for himself, the tale would be a true detective-story of the Intellectual type; but the writer keeps this clue to himself, and springs the detective's conclusions upon us like a bolt from the blue.

The Modern "Fair-play" Method

For many years, the newness of the genre and the immense prestige of Holmes blinded readers' eyes to these feats of legerdemain. Gradually, however, as the bedazzlement wore off, the public became more and more exacting. The uncritical are still catered for by the "thriller," in which nothing is explained, but connoisseurs have come, more and more, to call for a story which puts them on an equal footing with the detective himself, as regards all clues and discoveries.[32]

Seeing that the demand for equal opportunities is coupled to-day with an insistence on strict technical accuracy in the smallest details of the story, it is obvious that the job of writing detective-stories is by no means growing easier. The reader must be given every clue—but he must not be told, surely, all the de-

[32] Yet even to-day the naughty tradition persists. In *The Crime at Diana's Pool*, for instance (1927), V. L. Whitechurch sins notably; twice over, in this respect, in the course of an otherwise excellent tale. But such crimes bring their own punishment, for the modern reader is quick to detect and resent unfairness, and a stern, though kindly letter of rebuke is presently despatched to the erring author!

tective's deductions, lest he should see the solution too far ahead. Worse still, supposing, even without the detective's help, he interprets all the clues accurately on his own account, what becomes of the surprise? How can we at the same time show the reader everything and yet legitimately obfuscate him as to its meaning?

Various devices are used to get over the difficulty. Frequently the detective, while apparently displaying his clues openly, will keep up his sleeve some bit of special knowledge which the reader does not possess. Thus, Thorndyke can cheerfully show you all his finds. You will be none the wiser, unless you happen to have an intimate acquaintance with the fauna of local ponds; the effect of belladonna on rabbits; the physical and chemical properties of blood; optics; tropical diseases; metallurgy; hieroglyphics, and a few other trifles. Another method of misleading is to tell the reader what the detective has observed and deduced—but to make the observations and deductions turn out to be incorrect, thus leading up to a carefully manufactured surprise-packet in the last chapter.[33]

Some writers, like Mrs. Agatha Christie, still cling to the Watson formula. The story is told through the mouth, or at least through the eyes, of a Watson.[34] Others, like A. A. Milne in his *Red House Mystery*, adopt a mixed method. Mr. Milne begins by telling his tale from the position of a detached spectator; later on, we find that he has shifted round, and is telling it through the personality of Bill Beverley (a simple-minded but not unintelligent Watson); at another moment we find ourselves actually looking out through the eyes of Anthony Gillingham, the detective himself.

Importance of the Viewpoint

The skill of a modern detective novelist is largely shown by the play he makes with these various viewpoints.[35] Let us see how it is done in an acknowledged masterpiece of the genre. We will examine for the purpose a page of Mr. E. C. Bentley's *Trent's Last Case*. Viewpoint No. 1 is what we may call the Watson viewpoint; the detective's external actions only are seen by the reader. Viewpoint No. 2 is the middle viewpoint; we see what the detective sees, but are not told

[33] E. C. Bentley: *Trent's Last Case;* Lord Gorell: *In the Night;* George Pleydell: *The Ware Case;* etc.

[34] An exceptional handling of the Watson theme is found in Agatha Christie's *Murder of Roger Ackroyd*, which is a *tour de force*. Some critics, as, for instance, Mr. W. H. Wright in his introduction to *The Great Detective Stories* (Scribners, 1927), consider the solution illegitimate. I fancy, however, that this opinion merely represents a natural resentment at having been ingeniously bamboozled. All the necessary data are given. The reader ought to be able to guess the criminal, if he is sharp enough, and nobody can ask for more than this. It is, after all, the reader's job to keep his wits about him, and, like the perfect detective, to suspect *everybody*.

[35] For a most fascinating and illuminating discussion of this question of viewpoint in fiction, see Mr. Percy Lubbock: *The Craft of Fiction.*

what he observes. Viewpoint No. 3 is that of close intimacy with the detective; we see all he sees, and are at once told his conclusions.

We begin from Viewpoint No. 2.

"Two bedroom doors faced him on the other side of the passage. He opened that which was immediately opposite, and entered a bedroom by no means austerely tidy. Some sticks and fishing-rods stood confusedly in one corner, a pile of books in another. The housemaid's hand had failed to give a look of order to the jumble of heterogeneous objects left on the dressing-table and on the mantel-shelf—pipes, penknives, pencils, keys, golf-balls, old letters, photographs, small boxes, tins, and bottles. Two fine etchings and some water-colour sketches hung on the walls; leaning against the end of the wardrobe, unhung, were a few framed engravings."

First Shift: Viewpoint No. 1.

"A row of shoes and boots was ranged beneath the window. Trent crossed the room and studied them intently; then he measured some of them with his tape, whistling very softly. This done, he sat on the side of the bed, and his eyes roamed gloomily about the room."

Here we observe Trent walking, studying, measuring, whistling, looking gloomy; but we do not know what was peculiar about the boots, nor what the measurements were. From our knowledge of Trent's character we may suppose that his conclusions are unfavourable to the amiable suspect, Marlowe, but we are not ourselves allowed to handle the material evidence.

Second Shift: Back to Viewpoint No. 2.

"The photographs on the mantel-shelf attracted him presently. He rose and examined one representing Marlowe and Manderson on horseback. Two others were views of famous peaks in the Alps. There was a faded print of three youths—one of them unmistakably his acquaintance of the haggard blue eyes [i.e. Marlowe]—clothed in tatterdemalion soldier's gear of the sixteenth century. Another was a portrait of a majestic old lady, slightly resembling Marlowe. Trent, mechanically taking a cigarette from an open box on the mantel-shelf, lit it and stared at the photographs."

Here, as at the opening of the paragraph, we are promoted to a more privileged position. We see all the evidence, and have an equal opportunity with Trent of singling out the significant detail—the fancy-costume portrait—and deducting from it that Marlowe was an active member of the O.U.D.S., and, by inference, capable of acting a part at a pinch.

Third Shift: Viewpoint No. 3.

"Next he turned his attention to a flat leathern case that lay by the cigarette-box. It opened easily. A small and light revolver, of beautiful workmanship, was disclosed, with a score or so of loose cartridges. On the stock were engraved the initials 'J. M.' . . .

"With the pistol in its case between them, Trent and the Inspector looked into each other's eyes for some moments. Trent was the first to speak. 'This mystery is all wrong,' he observed. 'It is insanity. The symptoms of mania are very marked. Let us see how we stand.'"

Throughout the rest of this scene we are taken into Trent's confidence. The revolver is described, we learn what Trent thinks about it from his own lips. Thus, in a single page, the viewpoint is completely shifted three times, but so delicately that, unless we are looking for it, we do not notice the change. In a later chapter, we get the final shift to a fourth viewpoint—that of complete mental identification with the detective:

"Mrs. Manderson had talked herself into a more emotional mood than she had yet shown to Trent. Her words flowed freely, and her voice had begun to ring and give play to a natural expressiveness that must hitherto have been dulled, he thought, by the shock and self-restraint of the past few days."

Here the words "had yet shown to Trent" clinch the identification of viewpoint. Throughout the book, we always, in fact, see Mrs. Manderson through Trent's emotions, and the whole second half of the story, when Trent has abandoned his own enquiries and is receiving the true explanation from Marlowe and Cupples, is told from Viewpoint No. 4.

The modern evolution in the direction of "fair play"[36] is to a great extent a revolution. It is a recoil from the Holmes influence and a turning back to *The Moonstone* and its contemporaries. There is no mystification about *The Moonstone*—no mystification of the reader, that is. With such scrupulous care has Collins laid the clues that the "ideal reasoner" might guess the entire outline of the story at the end of the first ten chapters of Betteredge's first narrative.[37]

[36] It is needless to add that the detectives must be given fair play, too. Once they are embarked upon an investigation, no episode must ever be described which does not come within their cognisance. It is artistically shocking that the reader should be taken into the author's confidence behind the investigator's back. Thus, the reader's interest in *The Deductions of Colonel Gore* (Lynn Brock) is sensibly diminished by the fact of his knowing (as Gore does not) that it was Cecil Arndale who witnessed the scene between Mrs. Melhuish and Barrington near the beginning of the book. Those tales in which the action is frequently punctuated by eavesdropping of this kind on the reader's part belong to the merely Sensational class of detective-story, and rapidly decline into melodrama.

[37] Poe performed a similar feat in the case of *Barnaby Rudge*, of which he correctly prognosticated the whole development after reading the first serial part. Unhappily, he was not alive to perform the same office for *Edwin Drood!* Dickens came more and more to hanker after plot and mystery. His early efforts in this style are crude, and the mystery as a rule pretty transparent. In *Edwin Drood* he hoped that the "story would turn upon an interest suspended until the end," and the hope was only too thoroughly fulfilled. Undoubtedly his close friendship with Collins helped to influence him in the direction of mystery fiction; in the previous year (1867) he had pronounced *The Moonstone:* "Much better than anything he [Collins] has done."

Artistic Status of the Detective-Story

As the detective ceases to be impenetrable and infallible and becomes a man touched with the feeling of our infirmities, so the rigid technique of the art necessarily expands a little. In its severest form, the mystery-story is a pure analytical exercise, and, as such, may be a highly finished work of art, within its highly artificial limits. There is one respect, at least, in which the detective-story has an advantage over every other kind of novel. It possesses an Aristotelian perfection of beginning, middle, and end. A definite and single problem is set, worked out, and solved; its conclusion is not arbitrarily conditioned by marriage or death.[38] It has the rounded (though limited) perfection of a triolet. The farther it escapes from pure analysis, the more difficulty it has in achieving artistic unity.

It does not, and by hypothesis never can, attain the loftiest level of literary achievement. Though it deals with the most desperate effects of rage, jealousy, and revenge, it rarely touches the heights and depths of human passion. It presents us only with the *fait accompli*, and looks upon death and mutilation with a dispassionate eye. It does not show us the inner workings of the murderer's mind—it must not; for the identity of the murderer is hidden until the end of the book.[39] The victim is shown rather as a subject for the dissecting-table than as a husband and father. A too violent emotion flung into the glittering mechanism of the detective-story jars the movement by disturbing its delicate balance. The most successful writers are those who contrive to keep the story running from beginning to end upon the same emotional level, and it is better to err in the direction of too little feeling than too much. Here, the writer whose detective is a member of the official force has an advantage: from him a detached attitude is correct; he can suitably retain the impersonal attitude of the surgeon. The sprightly amateur must not be sprightly all the time, lest at some point we should be reminded that this is, after all, a question of somebody's being foully murdered, and that flippancy is indecent. To make the transition from the detached to the human point of view is one of the writer's hardest tasks. It is especially hard when the murderer has been made human and sympathetic. A real person has then to be brought to the gallows, and this must not be done too

[38] This should appeal to Mr. E. M. Forster, who is troubled by the irrational structure of the novel from this point of view. Unhappily, he has openly avowed himself "too priggish" to enjoy detective-stories. This is bad luck, indeed.

[39] An almost unique example of the detective-story told from the point of view of the hunted instead of the hunter is *Ashes to Ashes* by Isabel Ostrander. This shows the clues being left by the murderer, who is then compelled to look on while they are picked up, one after the other, by the detectives, despite all his desperate efforts to cover them. It is a very excellent piece of work which, in the hands of a writer of a little more distinction, might have been a powerful masterpiece. Isabel Ostrander, who also wrote under the name of Robert Orr Chipperfield and other pseudonyms, was a particularly competent spinner of yarns. Her straightforward police-detective, McCarty, is always confounding the conclusions of Terhune—a "scientific" private detective, who believes in modern psycho-analytical detective apparatus.

lightheartedly. Mr. G. K. Chesterton deals with this problem by merely refusing to face it. His Father Brown (who looks at sin and crime from the religious point of view) retires from the problem before the arrest is reached. He is satisfied with a confession. The sordid details take place "off." Other authors permit sympathetic villains to commit suicide. Thus, Mr. Milne's Gillingham, whose attitude starts by being flippant and ends by being rather sentimental, warns Cayley of his approaching arrest, and Cayley shoots himself, leaving a written confession. Monsters of villainy can, of course, be brought to a bad end without compunction; but modern taste rejects monsters, therefore the modern detective-story is compelled to achieve a higher level of writing, and a more competent delineation of character. As the villain is allowed more good streaks in his composition, so the detective must achieve a tenderer human feeling beneath his frivolity or machine-like efficiency.

Love Interest

One fettering convention, from which detective fiction is only very slowly freeing itself, is that of the "love interest." Publishers and editors still labour under the delusion that all stories must have a nice young man and woman who have to be united in the last chapter. As a result, some of the finest detective-stories are marred by a conventional love-story, irrelevant to the action and perfunctorily worked in. The most harmless form of this disease is that taken, for example, in the works of Mr. Austin Freeman. His secondary characters fall in love with distressing regularity, and perform a number of conventional antics suitable to persons in their condition, but they do not interfere with the course of the story. You can skip the love-passages if you like, and nothing is lost. Far more blameworthy are the heroes who insist on fooling about after young women when they ought to be putting their minds on the job of detection. Just at the critical moment when the trap is set to catch the villain, the sleuth learns that his best girl has been spirited away. Heedlessly he drops everything, and rushes off to Chinatown or to the lonely house on the marshes or wherever it is, without even leaving a note to say where he is going. Here he is promptly sandbagged or entrapped or otherwise made a fool of, and the whole story is impeded and its logical development ruined.

The instances in which the love-story is an integral part of the plot are extremely rare. One very beautiful example occurs in *The Moonstone*. Here the entire plot hangs on the love of two women for Franklin Blake. Both Rachel Verinder and Rosanna Spearman know that he took the diamond, and the whole mystery arises from their efforts to shield him. Their conduct is, in both cases, completely natural and right, and the characters are so finely conceived as to be entirely convincing. E. C. Bentley, in *Trent's Last Case*, has dealt finely with the still harder problem of the detective in love. Trent's love for Mrs. Manderson is a legitimate part of the plot; while it does not prevent him from drawing the proper conclusion from the evidence before him, it does prevent him from acting upon his conclusions, and so prepares the way for the real explanation.

Incidentally, the love-story is handled artistically and with persuasive emotion.

In *The House of the Arrow* and, still more strikingly, in *No Other Tiger*, A. E. W. Mason has written stories of strong detective interest which at the same time have the convincing psychological structure of the novel of character. The characters are presented as a novelist presents them—romantically, it is true, but without that stark insistence on classifying and explaining which turns the persons of the ordinary detective-story into a collection of museum exhibits.

Apart from such unusual instances as these, the less love in a detective-story, the better. "*L'amour au théâtre*," says Racine, "*ne peut pas être en seconde place*," and this holds good of detective fiction. A casual and perfunctory love-story is worse than no love-story at all, and, since the mystery must, by hypothesis, take the first place, the love is better left out.

Lynn Brock's *The Deductions of Colonel Gore* affords a curious illustration of this truth. Gore sets out, animated by an unselfish devotion to a woman, to recover some compromising letters for her, and, in so doing, becomes involved in unravelling an intricate murder plot. As the story goes on, the references to the beloved woman become chillier and more perfunctory; not only does the author seem to have lost interest, but so does Colonel Gore. At length the author notices this, and explains it in a paragraph:

> "There were moments when Gore accused himself—or, rather, felt that he ought to accuse himself—of an undue coldbloodedness in these speculations of his. The business was a horrible business. One ought to have been decently shocked by it. One ought to have been horrified by the thought that three old friends were involved in such a business.
>
> "But the truth was—and his apologies to himself for that truth became feebler and feebler—that the thing had now so caught hold of him that he had come to regard the actors in it as merely pieces of a puzzle baffling and engrossing to the verge of monomania."

There is the whole difficulty about allowing real human beings into a detective-story. At some point or other, either their emotions make hay of the detective interest, or the detective interest gets hold of them and makes their emotions look like pasteboard. It is, of course, a fact that we all adopt a detached attitude towards "a good murder" in the newspaper. Like Betteredge in *The Moonstone*, we get "detective fever," and forget the victim in the fun of tracking the criminal. For this reason, it is better not to pitch the emotional key too high at the start; the inevitable drop is thus made less jarring.

Future Developments: Fashions and Formulæ

Just at present, therefore, the fashion in detective fiction is to have characters credible and lively; not conventional, but, on the other hand, not too profoundly studied—people who live more or less on the *Punch* level of emotion. A little more psychological complexity is allowed than formerly; the villain may not be a villain from every point of view; the heroine, if there is one, is not necessarily

pure; the falsely accused innocent need not be a sympathetic character.[40] The automata—the embodied vices and virtues—the weeping fair-haired girl—the stupid but manly young man with the biceps—even the colossally evil scientist with the hypnotic eyes—are all disappearing from the intellectual branch of the art, to be replaced by figures having more in common with humanity.

An interesting symptom of this tendency is the arrival of a number of books and stories which recast, under the guise of fiction, actual murder cases drawn from real life. Thus, Mrs. Belloc Lowndes and Mrs. Victor Rickard have both dealt with the Bravo Poisoning Mystery. Anthony Berkeley has retold the Maybrick case; Mr. E. H. W. Meyerstein has published a play based on the Seddon poisoning case, and Mr. Aldous Huxley, in *The Gioconda Smile*, has reinterpreted in his own manner another famous case of recent years.[41]

We are now in a position to ask ourselves the favourite question of modern times: What next? Where is the detective-story going? Has it a future? Or will the present boom see the end of it?

The Most Unlikely Person

In early mystery fiction, the problem tends to be, *who* did the crime? At first, while readers were still unsophisticated, the formula of the Most Unlikely Person had a good run. But the reader soon learned to see through this. If there was a single person in the story who appeared to have no motive for the crime and who was allowed to amble through to the penultimate chapter free from any shadow of suspicion, that character became a marked man or woman. "I knew he must be guilty because nothing was said about him," said the cunning reader. Thus we come to a new axiom, laid down by Mr. G. K. Chesterton in a brilliant essay in the *New Statesman:* the real criminal must be suspected at least once in the course of the story. Once he is suspected, and then (apparently) cleared, he is made safe from future suspicion. This is the principle behind Mr. Wills Crofts' impregnable alibis, which are eventually broken down by painstaking enquiry. Probably the most baffling form of detective-story is still that in which suspicion is distributed equally among a number of candidates, one of whom turns out to be guilty. Other developments of the Most Unlikely Person formula make the guilty person a juror at the inquest or trial;[42] the detective himself;[43] the counsel for the prosecution;[44] and, as a supreme effort of unlikeliness, the actual narrator of the story.[45] Finally, resort has been made

[40] e.g. in J. J. Connington's *The Tragedy at Ravensthorpe*, where the agoraphobic Maurice is by no means an agreeable person to have about the house.

[41] *What Really Happened*, by Mrs. Belloc Lowndes; *Not Sufficient Evidence*, by Mrs. Victor Rickard; *The Wychford Poisoning Drama*, by the Author of *The Layton Court Mystery*; *Heddon*, by E. H. W. Meyerstein; *Mortal Coils* by Aldous Huxley.

[42] Robert Orr Chipperfield: *The Man in the Jury-Box.*

[43] Bernard Capes: *The Skeleton Key*; Gaston Leroux: *Mystère de la Chambre Jaune*; etc.

[44] G. K. Chesterton: *The Mirror of the Magistrate* (*Innocence of Father Brown*).

[45] Agatha Christie: *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd.*

to the double-cross, and the person originally suspected turns out to be the right person after all.[46]

The Unexpected Means

There are signs, however, that the possibilities of the formula are becoming exhausted, and of late years much has been done in exploring the solution by the unexpected means. With recent discoveries in medical and chemical science, this field has become exceedingly fruitful, particularly in the provision of new methods of murder. It is fortunate for the mystery-monger that, whereas, up to the present, there is only one known way of getting born, there are endless ways of getting killed. Here is a brief selection of handy short cuts to the grave: Poisoned tooth-stoppings; licking poisoned stamps; shaving-brushes inoculated with dread diseases; poisoned boiled eggs (a bright thought); poison-gas; a cat with poisoned claws; poisoned mattresses; knives dropped through the ceiling; stabbing with a sharp icicle; electrocution by telephone; biting by plague-rats and typhoid-carrying lice; boiling lead in the ears (much more effective than cursed hebanon in a vial); air-bubbles injected into the arteries; explosion of a gigantic "Prince Rupert's drop"; frightening to death; hanging head-downwards; freezing to atoms in liquid air; hypodermic injections shot from air-guns; exposure, while insensible, to extreme cold; guns concealed in cameras; a thermometer which explodes a bomb when the temperature of the room reaches a certain height; and so forth.

The methods of disposing of inconvenient corpses are also varied and peculiar; burial under a false certificate obtained in a number of ways; substitution of one corpse for another (very common in fiction, though rare in real life); mummification; reduction to bone-dust; electro-plating; arson; "planting" (not in the churchyard, but on innocent parties)—a method first made famous by R. L. Stevenson.[47] Thus, of the three questions, "Who?" "How?" and "Why?" "How" is at present the one which offers most scope for surprise and ingenuity, and is capable of sustaining an entire book on its own, though a combination of all three naturally provides the best entertainment.[48]

The mystery-monger's principal difficulty is that of varying his surprises. "You know my methods, Watson," says the detective, and it is only too painfully true. The beauty of Watson was, of course, that after thirty years he still did not know Holmes's methods; but the average reader is sharper-witted. After reading half a dozen stories by one author, he is sufficiently advanced in Dupin's psychological method[49] to see with the author's eyes. He knows that, when

[46] Father R. Knox: *The Viaduct Murder*, and others.

[47] *The Wrong Box.*

[48] Mr. Austin Freeman has specialised in a detective-story which rejects all three questions. He tells the story of the crime first, and relies for his interest on the pleasure afforded by following the ingenious methods of the investigator. *The Singing Bone* contains several tales of this type. Mr. Freeman has had few followers, and appears to have himself abandoned the formula, which is rather a pity.

[49] As outlined in *The Purloined Letter.*

Mr. Austin Freeman drowns somebody in a pond full of water-snails, there will be something odd and localised about those snails; he knows that, when one of Mr. Wills Crofts' characters has a cast-iron alibi, the alibi will turn out to have holes in it; he knows that if Father Knox casts suspicion on a Papist, the Papist will turn out to be innocent; instead of detecting the murderer, he is engaged in detecting the writer. That is why he gets the impression that the writer's later books are seldom or never "up to" his earlier efforts. He has become married to the writer's muse, and marriage has destroyed the mystery.

There certainly does seem a possibility that the detective-story will some time come to an end, simply because the public will have learnt all the tricks. But it has probably many years to go yet, and in the meantime a new and less rigid formula will probably have developed, linking it more closely to the novel of manners and separating it more widely from the novel of adventure. The latter will, no doubt, last as long as humanity, and while crime exists, the crime thriller will hold its place. It is, as always, the higher type that is threatened with extinction.

At the time of writing (1928) the detective-story is profiting by a reaction against novels of the static type. Mr. E. M. Forster is indeed left murmuring regretfully, "Yes, ah! yes—the novel tells a story"; but the majority of the public are rediscovering that fact with cries of triumph. Sexual abnormalities are suffering a slight slump at the moment; the novel of passion still holds the first place, especially among women, but even women seem to be growing out of the simple love-story. Probably the cheerful cynicism of the detective-tale suits better with the spirit of the times than the sentimentality which ends in wedding bells. For, make no mistake about it, the detective-story is part of the literature of escape, and not of expression. We read tales of domestic unhappiness because that is the kind of thing which happens to us; but when these things gall too close to the sore, we fly to mystery and adventure because they do not, as a rule, happen to us. "The detective-story," says Philip Guedalla, "is the normal recreation of noble minds." And it is remarkable how strong is the fascination of the higher type of detective-story for the intellectually-minded, among writers as well as readers. The average detective-novel to-day is extremely well written, and there are few good living writers who have not tried their hand at it at one time or another.[50]

Tales of Mystery and Horror

Concerning mystery and horror apart from detection, it is more difficult to

[50] Among men of letters distinguished in other lines who have turned their attention to the detective-story may be mentioned A. E. W. Mason, Eden Phillpotts, "Lynn Brock" (whose pseudonym protects the personality of a well-known writer), Somerset Maugham, Rudyard Kipling, A. A. Milne, Father R. Knox, J. D. Beresford.

It is owing to the work of such men as these that the detective-novel reaches a much higher artistic level in England than in any other country. At every turn the quality of the writing and the attention to beauty of form and structure betray the hand of the practised novelist.

attempt an historical outline. The early tales in this kind belong to the region of folk-lore rather than of fiction, and are easily available for study. Certain supernatural themes—witchcraft, fairies, vampires, were-wolfs, ghosts friendly and unfriendly, wraiths of the living—appear with comparatively little variation in the traditions of all countries. In modern stories of the weird, we may trace the same themes, rationalised or semi-rationalised, to suit our altered conceptions of the relation between flesh and spirit.

Among living masters, Dr. M. R. James is one who holds to the older methods. His hauntings are real hauntings, his ghosts and demons have an actual objective reality, and he offers no explanation of their existence. The vampires of E. F. Benson and Marion Crawford, similarly, are real vampires, visibly and carnally sucking the blood of their victims. To another school of writers, of whom Algernon Blackwood and Robert Hichens may be taken as examples, the ghostly presence or elemental spirit has become rather the "thought-shell" of an earth-bound mind—a record left upon the ether by passions existing in the past. It possesses, indeed, an objective existence, but this existence has been bestowed upon it by the power of human thought, and can be dissipated by the same means. The were-wolf is reinterpreted as the astral body of desire; the radiant energy released by ancient beliefs continues to vibrate wherever a psychic diaphragm is found to receive and reproduce it. The study of psychology has produced in addition a new kind of terror—the nightmare country between sanity and madness; the pressure of mind upon living mind, and the lonely horror of the dark places of the soul. In the purely human sphere of horror, spiritual cruelty now holds its place alongside with bodily cruelty, and we can place Ethel Colburn Mayne's *The Separate Room* next door to H. G. Wells's *The Cone* as examples of man's inhumanity to man.

As in every other kind of fiction, so in this: each day the public taste demands a greater subtlety of theme and treatment. The old raw-head-and-bloody-bones, with its apparatus of white sheet and clanking chains, no longer alarms us. It rouses us to ribald laughter, no less than the marvels of Otranto, and the statue from whose nose three drops of blood slowly and solemnly fall. Nor are we impressed by descriptions of hair standing on end with terror, or by flat-footed emphasis on the ghastly helped out with exclamation marks. It needs to-day the utmost cunning of the writer's craft to "put across" a ghost-story; the slightest touch of sentimentality or exaggeration is fatal to success.

In nothing is individual fancy so varied and capricious as in its perception of the horrible. To one person, E. L. White's *Lukundoo* is terrible beyond all imagination; to another, this story seems merely grotesque, and it is the imbecile endearments of the thing whose love "came to Professor Guildea" in Robert Hichens's story which arouse in him that delicious nausea we look for in a horror yarn. One cannot argue about these things. I remember reading somewhere about an old sundial, around whose face was written: IT IS LATER THAN YOU THINK. If that motto does not give you a "cauld grue," than nothing that I or any other person can say will convince you of its soul-shaking ghastliness. So that in any anthology of the horrible there must be many tales which the reader may think

silly or dull; and also many gaps, representing the tales which frighten him but have not frightened the editor. In such a case, editors can but do their best and hope for the best, within the limits imposed by a three dollar volume.

It remains to be added that many tales which on their merits lay claim to inclusion have had to be left out of the present book for one unavoidable reason or another. Space has necessitated the neglect of the whole vast field of foreign literature, in order that something like a representative selection of English tales might be attempted. Difficulties connected with copyright have caused a few regrettable omissions. Sometimes, also, a many times reprinted masterpiece has been deliberately passed over in favour of something less readily available. And, finally, many lacunæ must be attributed to ignorance, madam, pure ignorance on the editor's part.

It is hoped, however, that in running through the present volume, the reader will find himself presented with a kind of bird's-eye view of the general subject, extending from the literature of pure deduction on the one hand, through various types of mystery—natural and supernatural, explained and unexplained —to tales of sheer horror, without any mystery at all. Every tale in this book is guaranteed to have puzzled or horrified *somebody;* with any luck at all, some of them may puzzle and horrify *you.*

What a piece of work is man, that he should enjoy this kind of thing!
A very odd piece of work—indeed, a mystery!

DOROTHY L. SAYERS.

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D. L. S.

SECTION I

STORIES OF DETECTION AND MYSTERY

1

THE HISTORY OF BEL

The Babylonians had an idol called Bel, and there were spent upon him every day twelve great measures of fine flour, and forty sheep, and six vessels of wine. And the king worshipped it, and went daily to adore it; but Daniel worshipped his own God.

And the king said unto him: "Why dost not thou worship Bel?" Who answered and said: "Because I may not worship idols made with hands, but the living God, who hath created the heaven and the earth, and hath sovereignty over all flesh."

Then said the king unto him: "Thinkest thou not that Bel is a living God? Seest thou not how much he eateth and drinketh every day?" Then Daniel smiled, and said: "O king, be not deceived, for this is but clay within, and brass without, and did never eat or drink any thing."

So the king was wroth, and called for his priests and said unto them: "If ye tell me not who this is that devoureth these expences, ye shall die. But if ye can certify me that Bel devoureth them, then Daniel shall die, for he hath spoken blasphemously against Bel." And Daniel said unto the king, "Let it be according to thy word." Now the priests of Bel were three score and ten, besides their wives and children; and the king went with Daniel into the temple of Bel.

So Bel's priests said: "Lo, we go out, but thou, O king, set on the meat, and make ready the wine, and shut the door fast, and seal it with thine own signet. And to-morrow, when thou comest in, if thou findest not that Bel hath eaten up all, we will suffer death; or else Daniel that speaketh falsely against us."

And they little regarded it; for under the table they had made a privy entrance, whereby they entered in continually, and consumed those things.

So when they were gone forth, the king set meats before Bel. Now Daniel had commanded his servants to bring ashes, and those they strewed throughout all the temple, in the presence of the king alone; then went they out, and shut the door, and sealed it with the king's signet, and so departed.

Now in the night came the priests with their wives and children (as they were wont to do), and did eat and drink up all.

In the morning betime the king arose, and Daniel with him. And the king said: "Daniel, are the seals whole?" And he said: "Yea, O king, they be whole." And as soon as he had opened the door, the king looked upon the table, and cried with a loud voice: "Great art thou, O Bel, and with thee is no deceit at all."

Then laughed Daniel, and held the king that he should not go in, and said: "Behold now the pavement, and mark well whose footsteps are these." And the king said: "I see the footsteps of men, women, and children."

And then the king was angry, and took the priests with their wives and children, who showed him the privy doors where they came in, and consumed such things as were upon the table.

Therefore the king slew them, and delivered Bel into Daniel's power, who destroyed him and his temple.

The Apocryphal Scriptures

2

THE HISTORY OF SUSANNA

There dwelt a man in Babylon, called Joacim. And he took a wife, whose name was Susanna, the daughter of Chelcias, a very fair woman, and one that feared the Lord. Her parents also were righteous, and taught their daughter according to the law of Moses.

Now Joacim was a great, rich man, and had a fair garden joining unto his house, and to him resorted the Jews, because he was more honourable than all others.

The same year were appointed two of the ancients of the people to be judges, such as the Lord spake of, that wickedness came from Babylon from ancient judges, who seemed to govern the people. These kept much at Joacim's house; and all that had any suits in law came unto them.

Now, when the people departed away at noon, Susanna went into her husband's garden to walk. And the two elders saw her going in every day and walking, so that their lust was inflamed toward her. And they perverted their own mind, and turned away their eyes, that they might not look unto heaven, nor remember just judgments. And albeit they both were wounded with her love; yet durst not one show another his grief. For they were ashamed to declare their lust, that they desired to have to do with her. Yet they watched diligently from day to day to see her.

And the one said to the other: "Let us now go home, for it is dinner-time."

So when they were gone out, they parted the one from the other, and, turning back again, they came to the same place, and, after they had asked one another the cause, they acknowledged their lust; then appointed they a time both together when they might find her alone.

And it fell out as they watched a fit time, she went in as before, with two

maids only, and she was desirous to wash herself in the garden, for it was hot. And there was nobody there save the two elders that had hid themselves, and watched her.

Then she said to her maids: "Bring me oil and washing-balls, and shut the garden doors, that I may wash me." And they did as she bade them, and shut the garden doors, and went out themselves at privy doors to fetch the things that she had commanded them; but they saw not the elders, because they were hid.

Now, when the maids were gone forth, the two elders rose up, and ran unto her, saying: "Behold the garden doors are shut, that no man can see us, and we are in love with thee; therefore consent unto us, and lie with us. If thou wilt not, we will bear witness against thee, that a young man was with thee, and therefore thou didst send away thy maids from thee."

Then Susanna sighed, and said: "I am straitened on every side; for if I do this thing, it is death unto me, and if I do it not, I cannot escape your hands. It is better for me to fall into your hands, and not to do it, than to sin in the sight of the Lord."

With that Susanna cried with a loud voice; and the two elders cried out against her.

Then ran the one and opened the garden door.

So when the servants of the house heard the cry in the garden, they rushed in at a privy door, to see what was done unto her. But when the elders had declared their matter, the servants were greatly ashamed, for there never was such a report made of Susanna.

And it came to pass the next day, when the people were assembled to her husband Joacim, the two elders came also full of mischievous imagination against Susanna to put her to death, and said before the people: "Send for Susanna, the daughter of Chelcias, Joacim's wife." And so they sent.

So she came with her father and mother, her children, and all her kindred.

Now Susanna was a very delicate woman, and beauteous to behold. And these wicked men commanded to uncover her face (for she was covered) that they might be filled with her beauty. Therefore her friends, and all that saw her, wept.

Then the two elders stood up in the midst of the people, and laid their hands upon her head. And she, weeping, looked up towards heaven, for her heart trusted in the Lord.

And the elders said: "As we walked in the garden alone, this woman came in with two maids, and shut the garden doors, and sent the maids away. Then a young man, who there was hid, came unto her, and lay with her. Then we that stood in a corner of the garden, seeing this wickedness, ran unto them. And when we saw them together, the man we could not hold, for he was stronger than we, and opened the door, and leaped out. But having taken this woman, we asked who the young man was, but she would not tell us. These things do we testify."

Then the assembly believed them, as those that were the elders and judges of the people; so they condemned her to death.

Then Susanna cried out with a loud voice, and said: "O everlasting God, that knowest the secrets, and knowest all things before they be; thou knowest that they have borne false witness against me, and, behold, I must die; whereas I never did such things as these men have maliciously invented against me."

And the Lord heard her voice.

Therefore when she was led to be put to death, the Lord raised up the holy spirit of a young youth, whose name was Daniel, who cried with a loud voice: "I am clear from the blood of this woman!"

Then all the people turned them towards him, and said: "What mean these words that thou hast spoken?"

So he, standing in the midst of them, said: "Are ye such fools, ye sons of Israel, that, without examination or knowledge of the truth, ye have condemned a daughter of Israel? Return again to the place of judgment, for they have borne false witness against her."

Wherefore all the people turned again in haste, and the elders said unto him: "Come, sit down among us, and show it us, seeing God hath given thee the honour of an elder."

Then said Daniel unto them: "Put these two aside one far from another, and I will examine them."

So when they were put asunder one from another, he called one of them, and said unto him: "O thou that art waxen old in wickedness, now thy sins, which thou hast committed aforetime, are come to light. For thou hast pronounced false judgment and hast condemned the innocent, and hast let the guilty go free, albeit the Lord saith: 'The innocent and righteous shalt thou not slay.' Now, then, if thou hast seen her, tell me, under what tree sawest thou them companying together?" Who answered: "Under a mastick-tree."

And Daniel said: "Very well; thou hast lied against thine own head, for even now the angel of God hath received the sentence of God to cut thee in two."

So he put him aside, and commanded to bring the other, and said unto him: "O thou seed of Chanaan, and not of Juda, beauty hath deceived thee, and lust hath perverted thine heart. Thus have ye dealt with the daughters of Israel, and they for fear companied with you; but the daughter of Juda would not abide your wickedness. Now therefore tell me, under what tree didst thou take them companying together?" Who answered: "Under a holm-tree."

Then said Daniel unto him: "Well, thou hast also lied against thine own head, for the angel of God waiteth with the sword to cut thee in two, that he may destroy you."

With that all the assembly cried out with a loud voice, and praised God, who saveth them that trust in him. And they arose against the two elders (for Daniel had convicted them of false witness by their own mouth), and according to the law of Moses, they did unto them in such sort as they maliciously intended to do to their neighbour: and they put them to death. Thus the innocent blood was saved the same day.

Therefore Chelcias and his wife praised God for their daughter Susanna, with

Joacim her husband, and all the kindred, because there was no dishonesty found in her.

From that day forth was Daniel had in great reputation in the sight of the people.

Publius Vergilius Maro

THE STORY OF HERCULES AND CACUS

from The Æneid, Book VIII

Translation by courtesy of Mr. Robert Bevan

This is the story of Hercules and Cacus, as told by King Evander to his guest Æneas:

"These ceremonies, these ritual feasts, this altar of powerful divinity have not been set up by us through empty superstition or neglect of the old gods. We render sacrifice, my Trojan friend, because we were saved from deadly perils, and pay honour each year where honour is due. First of all, look at that rock-hung cliff: see how great masses of rock have been flung far apart and the mountain made desolate, how the boulders have left a great trail of ruin behind them. Here was a vast and yawning cavern, so deeply set that the sun's light could never penetrate it—the home of that dread figure Cacus, half man, half beast. The ground was always steaming with fresh slaughters, and, nailed to the insolent gates hung pale faces of men, grimly stained with blood. Vulcan was the father of this monster, and as Cacus moved his great bulk about, his mouth belched his father's deadly fires. But there came a time when help was brought to us in our longing through the coming of a god.

"For the great avenger came: Hercules, fresh from killing the three-formed Geryon, and proudly rich in spoils, drove the huge bulls this way in triumph—and his oxen filled the valley and the river-banks. But Cacus, with his wild robber's mind, determined that there should be no limit to his daring attempts in crime and cunning, bore off from the folds four splendid bulls and as many lovely heifers. And in order that their footprints might not give the true course away, he dragged them by the tails to his cave, and hid them beneath the dark rock, with the tracks of their journey pointing in the opposite direction. Thus, if anyone looked, no clues led to the cavern.

"In the meantime, when Hercules was moving his well-fed herds from their folds and getting ready for his departure, the oxen began to bellow at leaving, and all the woods were filled with their plaint and cry as they left the hills. One of the cows returned the call, and by lowing, where she was imprisoned in

the great cavern, cheated Cacus of his hopes. Then did Hercules' anger blaze out in fierce wrath; he snatched up his arms and his great knobbed club, and rushed to the heights of the towering crag. For the first time then our eyes saw Cacus afraid and in confusion. He fled straightway, swifter than the east wind, to his cave, and fear gave wings to his feet.

"He had scarcely shut himself in, and broken the chains to let down the huge boulder which his father's skill had hung in iron—he had scarcely fortified his entrance with this barrier, when Hercules was on him in his anger, ranging over every approach, facing this way and that, gnashing his teeth. Three times in the heat of his wrath he covered all the Aventine Hill, three times essayed the rocky entrance in vain, three times sank back weary in the valley. Now a sharp crag of flint, cut sheer from the rock on every side, rose high and clear over the ridge of the cavern—a proper nesting-place for birds of ill omen. It sloped from the ridge and leant towards the river on the left. Coming on it from the right, Hercules pushed in the opposite direction, shook it hard, tore it free from its lowest roots, and hurled it violently down. The great space of heaven thundered with the shock, the banks were flung apart, and the water flowed back in terror. But the den and great palace of Cacus were now revealed, and the gloomy caverns lay open to their depths; as if the depths of the earth were forced wide open, unlocking the infernal regions and disclosing those pale kingdoms hated of the gods; as if one gazed down upon the vast abyss with the Shades trembling at the inrush of light.

"On Cacus then, bellowing strangely now that he was caught by the unexpected light of day and pent up in the hollow of the rock, Hercules rained missiles, calling all his weapons into assistance and pressing him hard with branches and great mill-stones. But the giant, who had no other way of escape from his danger, belched great clouds of smoke from his jaws (a wonder, indeed), and wrapped his den in impenetrable obscurity, blinding the sight of the eye. The cavern was filled with a smoky night of flame whirled together with darkness. The great heart of Hercules could not let this be, and he flung himself through the fire in one great leap, where the smoke whirled thickest and the great cave seethed in black cloud. Here, where Cacus was vomiting out his useless fires in the gloom, he caught him and clasped him as if in a knot. Inexorably he choked him till his eyes burst forth and his throat was dry of blood.

"Straightway the doors were torn down and the gloomy den flung open. The stolen oxen and the booty that had been denied on oath were revealed to the light of day, and the hideous corpse was dragged out by its feet. Men could not have their fill of gazing on those terrible eyes, on the face of the monster and his hairy, bristly chest, on the flames that had been dried up in his throat. From that time has this divine honour been paid to Hercules, and a happy posterity celebrates the day."

Herodotus, Book II

THE STORY OF RHAMPSINITUS' TREASURE-HOUSE

(*Translated by* William Cary)

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King Rhampsinitus possessed a great quantity of money, such as no one of the succeeding kings was able to surpass, or even nearly come up to; and he, wishing to treasure up his wealth in safety, built a chamber of stone, of which one of the walls adjoined the outside of the palace. But the builder, forming a plan against it, devised the following contrivance; he fitted one of the stones so that it might be easily taken out by two men, or even one. When the chamber was finished, the king laid up his treasures in it; but in course of time the builder, finding his end approaching, called his sons to him, for he had two, and described to them how (providing for them that they might have abundant sustenance) he had contrived when building the king's treasury; and having clearly explained to them everything relating to the removal of the stone, he gave them its dimensions, and told them, if they would observe his instructions, they would be stewards of the king's riches. He accordingly died, and the sons were not long in applying themselves to the work; but having come by night to the palace, and having found the stone in the building, they easily removed it, and carried off a great quantity of treasure.

When the king happened to open the chamber, he was astonished at seeing the vessels deficient in treasure; but he was not able to accuse anyone, as the seals were unbroken, and the chamber well secured. When therefore, on his opening it two or three times, the treasures were always evidently diminished (for the thieves did not cease plundering), he adopted the following plan; he ordered traps to be made, and placed them round the vessels in which the treasures were. But when the thieves came as before, and one of them had entered, as soon as he went near a vessel, he was straightway caught in the trap; perceiving therefore in what a predicament he was, he immediately called to his brother, and told him what had happened, and bade him enter as quick as possible, and cut off his head, lest, if he was seen and recognised, he should ruin him also; the older thought that he spoke well, and did as he was advised; then, having fitted in the stone, he returned home, taking with him his brother's head.

When day came, the king having entered the chamber, was astonished at seeing the body of the thief in the trap without the head, but the chamber secure,

and without any means of entrance or exit. In this perplexity he contrived the following plan; he hung up the body of the thief from the wall, and having placed sentinels there, he ordered them to seize and bring before him whomsoever they should see weeping or expressing commiseration at the spectacle. The mother was greatly grieved at the body being suspended, and coming to words with her surviving son, commanded him, by any means he could, to contrive how he might take down and bring away the corpse of his brother; but, should he neglect to do so, she threatened to go to the king, and inform him that he had the treasures.

When the mother treated her surviving son harshly, and when with many entreaties he was unable to persuade her, he contrived the following plan: having got some asses, and having filled some skins with wine, he put them on the asses, and then drove them along; but when he came near the sentinels that guarded the suspended corpse, having drawn out two or three of the necks of the skins that hung down, he loosened them; and when the wine ran out, he beat his head, and cried aloud, as if he knew not to which of the asses he should turn first; but the sentinels, when they saw wine flowing in abundance, ran into the road, with vessels in their hands, caught the wine that was being spilt, thinking it all their own gain; but the man, feigning anger, railed bitterly against them all; however, as the sentinels soothed him, he at length pretended to be pacified, and to forego his anger; at last he drove his asses out of the road, and set them to rights again. When more conversation passed, and one of the sentinels joked with him and moved him to laughter, he gave them another of the skins; and they, just as they were, lay down and set to drink and joined him to their party, and invited him to stay and drink with them; he was persuaded, forsooth, and remained with them; and as they treated him kindly during the drinking, he gave them another of the skins; and the sentinels, having taken very copious draughts, became exceedingly drunk, and being overpowered by the wine, fell asleep on the spot where they had been drinking. But he, as the night was far advanced, took down the body of his brother, and by way of insult shaved the right cheeks of all the sentinels; then having laid the corpse on the asses, he drove home, having performed his mother's injunctions.

The king, when he was informed that the body of the thief had been stolen, was exceedingly indignant, and resolving by any means to find out the contriver of this artifice, had recourse, *as it is said*, to the following plan, a design which to me seems incredible: he placed his own daughter in a brothel, and ordered her to admit all alike to her embraces, but before they had intercourse with her, to compel each one to tell her what he had done during his life most clever and most wicked, and whosoever should tell her the facts relating to the thief, she was to seize, and not suffer him to escape. When, therefore, the daughter did what her father commanded, the thief, having ascertained for what purpose this contrivance was had recourse to, and being desirous to outdo the king in craftiness, did as follows: having cut off the arm of a fresh corpse at the shoulder, he took it with him under his cloak, and having gone in to the king's daughter, and being asked the same questions as all the rest were, he related that he had

done the most wicked thing when he cut off his brother's head who was caught in a trap in the king's treasury; and the most clever thing, when, having made the sentinels drunk, he took away the corpse of his brother that was hung up: she, when she heard this, endeavoured to seize him, but the thief in the dark held out to her the dead man's arm, and she seized it and held it fast, imagining that she had got hold of the man's own arm; then the thief, having let it go, made his escape through the door.

When this was also reported to the king, he was astonished at the shrewdness and daring of the man; and at last, sending throughout all the cities, he caused a proclamation to be made, offering a free pardon, and promising great reward to the man, if he would discover himself. The thief, relying on this promise, went to the king's palace; and Rhampsinitus greatly admired him and gave him his daughter in marriage, accounting him the most knowing of all men; for that the Egyptians are superior to all others, but he was superior to the Egyptians.

Mrs. Henry Wood

THE EBONY BOX

from Johnny Ludlow, 5th Series

Bentley, 1890

1

In one or two of the papers already written for you, I have spoken of "Lawyer Cockermuth," as he was usually styled by his fellow-townspeople at Worcester. I am now going to tell of something that happened in his family; that actually did happen, and is no invention of mine.

Lawyer Cockermuth's house stood in the Foregate Street. He had practised in it for a good many years; he had never married, and his sister lived with him. She had been christened Betty; it was a more common name in those days than it is in these. There was a younger brother named Charles. They were tall, wiry men with long arms and legs. John, the lawyer, had a smiling, homely face; Charles was handsome, but given to be choleric.

Charles had served in the militia once, and had been ever since called Captain Cockermuth. When only twenty-one he married a young lady with a good bit of money; he had also a small income of his own; so he abandoned the law, to which he had been bred, and lived as a gentleman in a pretty little house on the outskirts of Worcester. His wife died in the course of a few years, leaving him with one child, a son, named Philip. The interest of Mrs. Charles Cocker-

muth's money would be enjoyed by her husband until his death, and then would go to Philip.

When Philip left school he was articled to his uncle, Lawyer Cockermuth, and took up his abode with him. Captain Cockermuth (who was of a restless disposition, and fond of roving) gave up his house then and went travelling about. Philip Cockermuth was a very nice steady young fellow, and his father was liberal to him in the way of pocket-money, allowing him a guinea a week. Every Monday morning Lawyer Cockermuth handed (for his brother) to Philip a guinea in gold; the coin being in use then. Philip spent most of this in books, but he saved some of it; and by the time he was of age he had sixty golden guineas put aside in a small round black box of carved ebony. "What are you going to do with it, Philip?" asked Miss Cockermuth, as he brought it down from his room to show her. "I don't know what yet, Aunt Betty," said Philip, laughing. "I call it my nest-egg."

He carried the little black box (the sixty guineas quite filled it) back to his chamber and put it back into one of the pigeon-holes of the old-fashioned bureau which stood in the room, where he always kept it, and left it there, the bureau locked as usual. After that time, Philip put his spare money, now increased by a salary, into the Old Bank; and it chanced that he did not again look at the ebony box of gold, never supposing but that it was safe in its hiding-place. On the occasion of his marriage some years later, he laughingly remarked to Aunt Betty that he must now take his box of guineas into use; and he went up to fetch it. The box was not there.

Consternation ensued. The family flocked upstairs; the lawyer, Miss Betty, and the captain—who had come to Worcester for the wedding, and was staying in the house—one and all put their hands into the deep, dark pigeon-holes, but failed to find the box. The captain, a hot-tempered man, flew into a passion and swore over it; Miss Betty shed tears; Lawyer Cockermuth, always cool and genial, shrugged his shoulders and absolutely joked. None of them could form the slightest notion as to how the box had gone or who was likely to have taken it, and it had to be given up as a bad job.

Philip was married the next day, and left his uncle's house for good, having taken one out Barbourne way. Captain Cockermuth felt very sore about the loss of the box, he strode about Worcester talking of it, and swearing that he would send the thief to Botany Bay if he could find him.

A few years more yet, and poor Philip became ill. Ill of the disorder which had carried off his mother—decline. When Captain Cockermuth heard that his son was lying sick, he being (as usual) on his travels, he hastened to Worcester and took up his abode at his brother's—always his home on these visits. The disease was making very quick progress indeed; it was what is called "rapid decline." The captain called in all the famed doctors of the town—if they had not been called before: but there was no hope.

The day before Philip died, his father spoke to him about the box of guineas. It had always seemed to the captain that Philip must have, or ought to have,

some notion of how it went. And he put the question to him again, solemnly, for the last time.

"Father," said the dying man—who retained all his faculties and his speech to the very end—"I declare to you that I have none. I have never been able to set up any idea at all upon the loss, or attach suspicion to a soul, living or dead. The two maids were honest; they would not have touched it; the clerks had no opportunity of going upstairs. I had always kept the key safely, and you know that we found the lock of the bureau had not been tampered with."

Poor Philip died. His widow and four children went to live at a pretty cottage on Malvern Link—upon a hundred pounds a year, supplied to her by her father-in-law. Mr. Cockermuth added the best part of another hundred. These matters settled, Captain Cockermuth set off on his rovings again, considering himself hardly used by Fate at having his limited income docked of nearly half its value. And yet some more years passed on.

This much has been by way of introduction to what has to come. It was best to give it.

Mr. and Mrs. Jacobson, our neighbours at Dyke Manor, had a whole colony of nephews, what with brothers' sons and sisters' sons; of nieces also; batches of them would come over in relays to stay at Elm Farm, which had no children of its own. Samson Dene was the favourite nephew of all; his mother was sister to Mr. Jacobson, his father was dead. Samson Reginald Dene he was christened, but most people called him "Sam." He had been articled to the gentleman who took to his father's practice; a lawyer in a village in Oxfordshire. Later, he had gone to a firm in London for a year, had passed, and then came down to his uncle at Elm Farm, asking what he was to do next. For, upon his brother-in-law's death, Mr. Jacobson had taken upon himself the expenses of Sam, the oldest son.

"Want to know what you are to do now, eh?" cried old Jacobson, who was smoking his evening pipe by the wide fire of the dark-wainscoted, handsome dining-parlour, one evening in February. He was a tall, portly man with a fresh-coloured, healthy face; and not, I dare say, far off sixty years old. "What would you like to do?—what is your own opinion upon it, Sam?"

"I should like to set up in practice for myself, uncle."

"Oh, indeed! In what quarter of the globe, pray?"

"In Worcester. I have always wished to practise at Worcester. It is the assize town: I don't care for pettifogging places: one can't get on in them."

"You'd like to emerge all at once into a full-blown lawyer there? That's your notion, is it, Sam?"

Sam made no answer. He knew by the tone his notion was being laughed at.

"No, my lad. When you have been in some good office for another year or two maybe, then you might think about setting up. The office can be in Worcester if you like."

"I am hard upon twenty-three, Uncle Jacobson. I have as much knowledge of law as I need."

"And as much steadiness also, perhaps?" said old Jacobson.

Sam turned as red as the table-cover. He was a frank-looking, slender young

fellow of middle height, with fine wavy hair almost a gold colour and worn of a decent length. The present fashion—to be cropped as if you were a prison-bird and to pretend to like it so—was not favoured by gentlemen in those days.

"You may have been acquiring a knowledge of law in London, Sam; I hope you have; but you've been kicking up your heels over it. What about those sums of money you've more than once got out of your mother?"

Sam's face was a deeper red than the cloth now. "Did she tell you of it, uncle?" he gasped.

"No, she didn't; she cares too much for her graceless son to betray him. I chanced to hear of it, though."

"One has to spend so much in London," murmured Sam, in lame apology.

"I dare say! In my past days, sir, a young man had to cut his coat according to his cloth. We didn't rush into all kinds of random games and then go to our fathers or mothers to help us out of them. Which is what you've been doing, my gentleman."

"Does aunt know?" burst out Sam in a fright, as a step was heard on the stairs.

"I've not told her," said Mr. Jacobson, listening—"she is gone on into the kitchen. How much is it that you've left owing in London, Sam?"

Sam nearly choked. He did not perceive this was just a random shot: he was wondering whether magic had been at work.

"Left owing in London?" stammered he.

"That's what I asked. How much? And I mean to know. 'Twon't be of any use your fencing about the bush. Come! tell it in a lump."

"Fifty pounds would cover it all, sir," said Sam, driven by desperation into the avowal.

"I want the truth, Sam."

"That is the truth, uncle, I put it all down in a list before leaving London: it comes to just under fifty pounds."

"How could you be so wicked as to contract it?"

"There has not been much wickedness about it," said Sam miserably, "indeed there hasn't. One gets drawn into expenses unconsciously in the most extraordinary manner up in London. Uncle Jacobson, you may believe me or not, when I say that until I added it up, I did not think it amounted to twenty pounds in all."

"And then you found it to be fifty! How do you propose to pay this?"

"I intend to send it up by instalments, as I can."

"Instead of doing which, you'll get into deeper debt at Worcester. If it's Worcester you go to."

"I hope not, uncle. I shall do my best to keep out of debt. I mean to be steady."

Mr. Jacobson filled a fresh pipe, and lighted it with a spill from the mantelpiece. He did not doubt the young fellow's intentions; he only doubted his resolution.

"You shall go into some lawyer's office in Worcester for two years, Sam, when

we shall see how things turn out," said he presently. "And, look here, I'll pay these debts of yours myself, provided you promise me not to get into trouble again. There, no more"—interrupting Sam's grateful looks—"your aunt's coming in."

Sam opened the door for Mrs. Jacobson. A little pleasant-faced woman in a white net cap, with small flat silver curls under it. She carried a small basket lined with blue silk, in which lay her knitting.

"I've been looking to your room, my dear, to see that all's comfortable for you," she said to Sam, as she sat down by the table and the candles. "That new housemaid of ours is not altogether to be trusted. I suppose you've been telling your uncle all about the wonders of London?"

"And something else, too," put in old Jacobson gruffly. "He wanted to set up in practice for himself at Worcester: off-hand, red-hot!"

"Oh dear!" said Mrs. Jacobson.

"That's what the boy wanted, nothing less. No. Another year or two's work in some good house, to acquire stability and experience, and then he may talk about setting up. It will be all for the best, Sam; trust me."

"Well, uncle, perhaps it will." It was of no use for him to say perhaps it won't: he could not help himself. But it was a disappointment.

Mr. Jacobson walked over to Dyke Manor the next day, to consult the Squire as to the best lawyer to place Sam with, himself suggesting their old friend Cockermuth. He described all Sam's wild ways (it was how he put it) in that dreadful place, London, and the money he had got out of amidst its snares. The Squire took up the matter with his usual hearty sympathy, and quite agreed that no practitioner in the law could be so good for Sam as John Cockermuth.

John Cockermuth proved to be agreeable. He was getting to be an elderly man then, but was active as ever, saving when a fit of the gout took him. He received young Dene in his usual cheery manner, upon the day appointed for his entrance, and assigned him his place in the office next to Mr. Parslet. Parslet had been there more than twenty years; he was, so to say, at the top and tail of all the work that went on in it, but he was not a qualified solicitor. Samson Dene was qualified, and could therefore represent Mr. Cockermuth before the magistrates and what not, of which the old lawyer expected to find the benefit.

"Where are you going to live?" he questioned of Sam that first morning.

"I don't know yet, sir. Mr. and Mrs. Jacobson are about the town now, I believe, looking for lodgings for me. Of course they couldn't let *me* look; they'd think I should be taken in," added Sam.

"Taken in and done for," laughed the lawyer. "I should not wonder but Mr. Parslet could accommodate you. Can you, Parslet?"

Mr. Parslet looked up from his desk, his thin cheeks flushing. He was small and slight, with weak brown hair, and had a patient, sad sort of look in his face and in his meek, dark eyes.

James Parslet was one of those men who are said to spoil their own lives. Left alone early, he was looked after by a bachelor uncle, a minor canon of the cathedral, who perhaps tried to do his duty by him in a mild sort of manner.

But young Parslet liked to go his own ways, and they were not very good ways. He did not stay at any calling he was put to, trying first one and then another; either the people got tired of him, or he of them. Money (when he got any) burnt a hole in his pocket, and his coats grew shabby and his boots dirty. "Poor Jamie Parslet! how he has spoilt his life!" cried the town, shaking its pitying head at him: and thus things went on till he grew to be nearly thirty years of age. Then, to the public astonishment, Jamie pulled up. He got taken on by Lawyer Cockermuth as copying clerk at twenty shillings a week, married, and became as steady as Old Time. He had been nothing but steady from that day to this, had forty shillings a week now, instead of twenty, and was ever a meek, subdued man, as if he carried about with him a perpetual repentance for the past, regret for the life that might have been. He lived in Edgar Street, which is close to the cathedral, as every one knows, Edgar Tower being at the top of it. An old gentleman attached to the cathedral had now lodged in his house for ten years, occupying the drawing-room floor; he had recently died, and hence Lawyer Cockermuth's suggestion.

Mr. Parslet looked up. "I should be happy to, sir," he said; "if our rooms suited Mr. Dene. Perhaps he would like to look at them?"

"I will," said Sam. "If my uncle and aunt do not fix on any for me."

Is there any subtle mesmeric power, I wonder, that influences things unconsciously? Curiously to say, at this very moment Mr. and Mrs. Jacobson were looking at these identical rooms. They had driven into Worcester with Sam very early indeed, so as to have a long day before them, and when breakfast was over at the inn, took the opportunity, which they very rarely got, of slipping into the cathedral to hear the beautiful ten o'clock service. Coming out the cloister way when it was over, and so down Edgar Street, Mrs. Jacobson espied a card in a window with "Lodgings" on it. "I wonder if they would suit Sam?" she cried to her husband. "Edgar Street is a nice, wide, open street, and quiet. Suppose we look at them?"

A young servant-maid, called by her mistress "Sally," answered the knock. Mrs. Parslet, a capable, bustling woman of ready speech and good manners, came out of the parlour, and took the visitors to the floor above. They liked the rooms and they liked Mrs. Parslet; they also liked the moderate rent asked, for respectable country people in those days did not live by shaving one another; and when it came out that the house's master had been clerk to Lawyer Cockermuth for twenty years, they settled the matter off-hand, without the ceremony of consulting Sam. Mrs. Jacobson looked upon Sam as a boy still. Mr. Jacobson might have done the same but for the debts made in London.

And all this, you will say, has been yet more explanation; but I could not help it. The real thing begins now, with Sam Dene's sojourn in Mr. Cockermuth's office, and his residence in Edgar Street.

The first Sunday of his stay there, Sam went out to attend the morning service in the cathedral, congratulating himself that that grand edifice stood so conveniently near, and looking, it must be confessed, a bit of a dandy, for he had put a little bunch of spring violets into his coat, and "button-holes" were quite

out of the common way then. The service began with the Litany, the earlier service of prayers being held at eight o'clock. Sam Dene has not yet forgotten that day, for it is no imaginary person I am telling you of, and never will forget it. The Reverend Allen Wheeler chanted, and the prebendary in residence (Somers Cocks) preached. While wondering when the sermon (a very good one) would be over, and thinking it rather prosy, after the custom of young men, Sam's roving gaze was drawn to a young lady sitting in the long seat opposite to him on the other side of the choir, whose whole attention appeared to be given to the preacher, to whom her head was turned. It is a nice face, thought Sam; such a sweet expression in it. It really was a nice face, rather pretty, gentle and thoughtful, a patient look in the dark brown eyes. She had on a well-worn dark silk, and a straw bonnet; all very quiet and plain; but she looked very much of a lady. Wonder if she sits there always? thought Sam.

Service over, he went home, and was about to turn the handle of the door to enter (looking another way) when he found it turned for him by some one who was behind and had stretched out a hand to do it. Turning quickly, he saw the same young lady.

"Oh, I beg your pardon," said Sam, all at sea; "did you wish to come in here?"

"If you please," she answered—and her voice was sweet and her manner modest.

"Oh," repeated Sam, rather taken aback at the answer. "You did not want me, did you?"

"Thank you, it is my home," she said.

"Your home?" stammered Sam, for he had not seen the ghost of any one in the house yet, saving his landlord and landlady and Sally. "Here?"

"Yes. I am Maria Parslet."

He stood back to let her enter; a slender, gentle girl of middle height; she looked about eighteen, Sam thought (she was that and two years on to it), and he wondered where she had been hidden. He had to go out again, for he was invited to dine at Lawyer Cockermuth's, so he saw no more of the young lady that day; but she kept dancing about in his memory. And somehow she so fixed herself in it, and as the time went on so grew in it, and at last so filled it, that Sam may well hold that day as a marked day—the one that introduced him to Maria Parslet. But that is anticipating.

On the Monday morning all his ears and eyes were alert, listening and looking for Maria. He did not see her; he did not hear a sound of her. By degrees he got to learn that the young lady was a resident teacher in a ladies' school hard by; and that she was often allowed to spend the whole day at home on Sundays. One Sunday evening he ingeniously got himself invited to take tea in Mrs. Parslet's parlour, and thus became acquainted with Maria; but his opportunities for meeting her were rare.

There's not much to tell of the first twelvemonth. It passed in due course. Sam Dene was fairly steady. He made a few debts, as some young men, left to themselves, can't help making—at least, they'd tell you they can't. Sundry friends

of Sam's in Worcester knew of this, and somehow it reached Mr. Cockermuth's ears, who gave Sam a word of advice privately.

This was just as the first year expired. According to agreement, Sam had another year to stay. He entered upon it with inward gloom. On adding up his scores, which he deemed it as well to do after his master's lecture, he again found that they amounted to far more than he had thought for, and how he should contrive to pay them out of his own resources he knew no more than the man in the moon. In short, he could not do it; he was in a fix; and lived in perpetual dread of its coming to the ears of his uncle Jacobson.

The spring assize, taking place early in March, was just over; the judges had left the town for Stafford, and Worcester was settling down again to quietness. Miss Cockermuth gave herself and her two handmaidens a week's rest—assize time being always a busy and bustling period at the lawyer's, no end of chance company looking in—and then the house began its spring cleaning, a grand institution with our good grandmothers, often lasting a couple of weeks. This time, at the lawyer's house, it was to be a double bustle; for visitors were being prepared for.

It had pleased Captain Cockermuth to write word that he should be at home for Easter; upon which, the lawyer and his sister decided to invite Philip's widow and her children also to spend it with them; they knew Charles would be pleased. Easter-Day was very early indeed that year, falling at the end of March.

To make clearer what's coming, the house had better have a word or two of description. You entered from the street into a wide passage; no steps. On the left was the parlour and general sitting-room, in which all meals were usually taken. It was a long, low room, its two rather narrow windows looking upon the street, the back of the room being a little dark. Opposite the door was the fireplace. On the other side the passage, facing the parlour-door, was the door that opened to the two rooms (one front, one back) used as the lawyer's offices. The kitchens and staircase were at the back of the passage, a garden lying beyond; and there was a handsome drawing-room on the first floor, not much used.

The house, I say, was in a commotion with the spring cleaning, and the other preparations. To accommodate so many visitors required contrivance: a bedroom for the captain, a bedroom for his daughter-in-law, two bedrooms for the children. Mistress and maids held momentous consultations together.

"We have decided to put the three little girls in Philip's old room, John," said Miss Betty to her brother, as they sat in the parlour after dinner on the Monday evening of the week preceding Passion Week; "and little Philip can have the small room off mine. We shall have to get in a child's bed, though; I can't put the three little girls in one bed; they might get fighting. John, I do wish you'd sell that old bureau for what it will fetch."

"Sell the old bureau!" exclaimed Mr. Cockermuth.

"I'm sure I should. What good does it do? Unless that bureau goes out of the room, we can't put the extra bed in. I've been in there half the day with Susan and Ann, planning and contriving, and we find it can't be done any way. Do let

Ward take it away, John; there's no place for it in the other chambers. He'd give you a fair price for it, I dare say."

Miss Betty had never cared for this piece of furniture, thinking it more awkward than useful; she looked eagerly at her brother, awaiting his decision. She was the elder of the two; tall, like him; but whilst he maintained his thin, wiry form, just the shape of an upright gas-post with arms, she had grown stout with no shape at all. Miss Betty had dark, thick eyebrows and an amiable red face. She wore a "front" of brown curls with a high and dressy cap perched above it. This evening her gown was of soft twilled shot-green silk, a white net kerchief was crossed under its body, and she had on a white muslin apron.

"I don't mind," assented the lawyer, as easy in disposition as Miss Betty was; "it's of no use keeping it that I know of. Send for Ward and ask him, if you like, Betty."

Ward, a carpenter and cabinet-maker, who had a shop in the town and sometimes bought second-hand things, was sent for by Miss Betty on the following morning; and he agreed, after some chaffering, to buy the old bureau. It was the bureau from which Philip's box of gold had disappeared—but I dare say you have understood that. In the midst of all this stir and clatter, just as Ward betook himself away after concluding the negotiation, and the maids were hard at work above the stairs with mops and pails and scrubbing-brushes, the first advance-guard of the visitors unexpectedly walked in: Captain Cockermuth.

Miss Betty sat down in an access of consternation. She could do nothing but stare. He had not been expected for a week yet; there was nothing ready and nowhere to put him.

"I wish you'd take to behaving like a rational being, Charles!" she exclaimed. "We are all in a mess; the rooms upside down, and the bedside carpets hanging out at the windows."

Captain Cockermuth said he did not care for bedside carpets, he could sleep anywhere—on the brewhouse-bench, if she liked. He quite approved of selling the old bureau, when told it was going to be done.

Ward had appointed five o'clock that evening to fetch it away. They were about to sit down to dinner when he came, five o'clock being the hour for late dinners then in ordinary life. Ward had brought a man with him and they went upstairs.

Miss Betty, as carver, sat at the top of the dining-table, her back to the windows, the lawyer in his place at the foot, Charles between them, facing the fire. Miss Betty was cutting off the first joint of a loin of veal when the bureau was heard coming down the staircase with much bumping and noise.

Mr. Cockermuth stepped out of the dining-room to look on. The captain followed: being a sociable man with his fellow-townspeople, he went to ask Ward how he did.

The bureau came down safely, and was lodged at the foot of the stairs; the man wiped his hot face, while Ward spoke with Captain Cockermuth. It seemed quite a commotion in the usual quiet dwelling. Susan, a jug of ale in her hand, which she had been to the cellar to draw, stood looking on from the passage;

Mr. Dene and a younger clerk, coming out of the office just then to leave for the evening, turned to look on also.

"I suppose there's nothing in here, sir?" cried Ward, returning to business and the bureau.

"Nothing, I believe," replied Mr. Cockermuth.

"Nothing at all," called out Miss Betty through the open parlour-door. "I emptied the drawers this morning."

Ward, a cautious man and honest, drew back the lid and put his hand in succession into the pigeon-holes, which had not been used since Philip's time. There were twelve of them; three above, and three below on each side, and a little drawer that locked in the middle. "Halloa!" cried Ward, when his hand was in the depth of one of them: "here's something."

And he drew forth the lost box. The little ebony box with all the gold in it.

Well now, that was a strange thing. Worcester thinks so, those people who are still living to remember it, to this day. How it was that the box had appeared to be lost and was searched for in vain over and over again, by poor Philip and others; and how it was that it was now recovered in this easy and natural manner, was never explained or accounted for. Ward's opinion was that the box must have been put in, side upwards, that it had in some way stuck to the back of the deep, narrow pigeon-hole, which just about held the box in width, that those who had searched took the box for the back of the hole when their fingers touched it, and that the bumping of the bureau now in coming downstairs had dislodged the box and brought it forward. As a maker of bureaus, Ward's opinion was listened to with deference. Any way, it was a sort of theory, serving passably well in the absence of any other. But who knew? All that was certain about it was the fact; the loss and the recovery after many years. It happened just as here described, as I have already said.

Sam Dene had never heard of the loss. Captain Cockermuth perfectly beside himself with glee, explained it to him. Sam laughed as he touched with his forefinger the closely packed golden guineas, lying there so snug and safe, offered his congratulations, and walked home to tea.

It chanced that on that especial Tuesday evening, matters were at sixes and sevens in the Parslets' house. Sally had misbehaved herself and was discharged in consequence; and the servant engaged in her place, who was to have entered that afternoon, had not made her appearance. When Sam entered, Maria came out of the parlour, a pretty blush upon her face. And to Sam the unexpected sight of her, it was not often he got a chance of it, and the blush and the sweet eyes came like a gleam of Eden, for he had grown to love her dearly. Not that he had owned it to himself yet.

Maria explained. Her school had broken up for the Easter holidays earlier than it ought, one of the girls showing symptoms of measles; and her mother had gone out to see what had become of the new servant, leaving a request that Mr. Dene would take his tea with them in the parlour that evening, as there was no one to wait on him.

Nothing loth, you may be sure, Mr. Dene accepted the invitation, running up

to wash his hands, and give a look at his hair, and running down in a trice. The tea-tray stood in readiness on the parlour-table, Maria sitting behind it. Perhaps she had given a look at *her* hair, for it was quite more lovely, Sam thought, more soft and silken than any hair he had ever seen. The little copper kettle sang away on the hob by the fire.

"Will papa be long, do you know?" began Maria demurely, feeling shy and conscious at being thus thrown alone into Sam's company. "I had better not make the tea until he comes in."

"I don't know at all," answered Sam. "He went out on some business for Mr. Cockermuth at half-past four, and was not back when I left. Such a curious thing has just happened up there, Miss Parslet!"

"Indeed! What is it?"

Sam entered on the narrative. Maria, who knew all about the strange loss of the box, grew quite excited as she listened. "Found!" she exclaimed. "Found in the same bureau! And all the golden guineas in it!"

"Every one," said Sam: "as I take it. They were packed right up to the top!"

"Oh, what a happy thing!" repeated Maria, in a fervent tone that rather struck Sam, and she clasped her fingers into one another, as one sometimes does in pleasure or in pain.

"Why do you say that, Miss Parslet?"

"Because papa—but I do not think I ought to tell you," added Maria, breaking off abruptly.

"Oh, yes, you may. I am quite safe, even if it's a secret. Please do."

"Well," cried the easily persuaded girl, "papa has always had an uncomfortable feeling upon him ever since the loss. He feared that some people, knowing he was not well off, might think perhaps it was he who had stolen upstairs and taken it."

Sam laughed at that.

"He has never *said* so, but somehow we have seen it, my mother and I. It was altogether so mysterious a loss, you see, affording no clue as to *when* it occurred, that people were ready to suspect anything, however improbable. Oh, I am thankful it is found!"

The kettle went on singing, the minutes went on flitting, and still nobody came. Six o'clock struck out from the cathedral as Mr. Parslet entered. Had the two been asked the time, they might have said it was about a quarter-past five. Golden hours fly quickly; fly on angels' wings.

Now it chanced that whilst they were at tea, a creditor of Sam's came to the door, one Jonas Badger. Sam went to him: and the colloquy that ensued might be heard in the parlour. Mr. Badger said (in quite a fatherly way) that he really could not be put off any longer with promises; if his money was not repaid to him before Easter he should be obliged to take steps about it, should write to Mr. Jacobson, of Elm Farm, to begin with. Sam returned to the tea-table with a wry face.

Soon after that, Mrs. Parslet came in, the delinquent servant in her rear. Next, a friend of Sam's called, Austin Chance, whose father was a solicitor in good

practice in the town. The two young men, who were very intimate and often together, went up to Sam's room above.

"I say, my good young friend," began Chance, in a tone that might be taken for jest or earnest, "don't you go and get into any entanglement in that quarter."

"What d'you mean now?" demanded Sam, turning the colour of the rising sun.

"I mean Maria Parslet," said Austin Chance, laughing. "She's a deuced nice girl; I know that; just the one a fellow might fall in love with unawares. But it wouldn't do, Dene."

"Why wouldn't it do?"

"Oh, come now, Sam, you know it wouldn't. Parslet is only a working clerk at Cockermuth's."

"I should like to know what has put the thought in your head?" contended Sam. "You had better put it out again. I've never told you I was falling in love with her; or told herself, either. Mrs. Parslet would be about me, I expect, if I did. She looks after her as one looks after gold."

"Well, I found you in their room, having tea with them, and—"

"It was quite an accident, an exceptional thing," interrupted Sam.

"Well," repeated Austin, "you need not put your back up, old fellow; a friendly warning does no harm. Talking of gold, Dene, I've done my best to get up the twenty pounds you wanted to borrow of me, and I can't do it. I'd let you have it with all my heart if I could; but I find I am harder up than I thought for."

Which was all true. Chance was as good-natured a young man as ever lived, but at this early stage of his life he made more debts than he could pay.

"Badger has just been here, whining and covertly threatening," said Sam. "I am to pay up in a week, or he'll make me pay—and tell my uncle, he says, to begin with."

"Hypocritical old skinflint!" ejaculated Chance, himself sometimes in the hands of Mr. Badger—a worthy gentleman who did a little benevolent usury in a small and quiet way, and took his delight in accommodating safe young men. A story was whispered that young M., desperately hard-up, borrowed two pounds from him one Saturday night, undertaking to repay it, with two pounds added on for interest, that day month; and when the day came and M. had not got the money, or was at all likely to get it, he carried off a lot of his mother's plate under his coat to the pawnbroker's.

"And there's more besides Badger's that is pressing," went on Dene. "I must get money from somewhere, or it will play the very deuce with me. I wonder whether Charley Hill could lend me any?"

"Don't much think so. You might ask him. Money seems scarce with Hill always. Has a good many ways for it, I fancy."

"Talking of money, Chance, a lot has been found at Cockermuth's to-day. A box full of guineas that has been lost for years."

Austin Chance stared. "You don't mean that box of guineas that mysteriously disappeared in Philip's time?"

"Well, they say so. It is a small, round box of carved ebony, and it is stuffed to the brim with old guineas. Sixty of them, I hear."

"I can't believe it's true; that *that's* found."

"Not believe it's true, Chance! Why, I saw it. Saw the box found, and touched the guineas with my fingers. It has been hidden in an old bureau all the time," added Sam, and he related the particulars of the discovery.

"What an extraordinary thing!" exclaimed young Chance: "the queerest start I ever heard of." And he fell to musing.

But the "queer start," as Mr. Austin Chance was pleased to designate the resuscitation of the box, did not prove to be a lucky one.

2

The sun shone brightly on Foregate Street, but did not yet touch the front windows on Lawyer Cockermuth's side of it. Miss Betty Cockermuth sat near one of them in the parlour, spectacles on nose, and hard at work unpicking the braid of some very old woollen curtains, green once, but now faded to a sort of dingy brown. It was Wednesday morning, the day following the wonderful event of finding the box, lost so long, full of its golden guineas. In truth nobody thought of it as anything less than marvellous.

The house-cleaning, in preparation for Easter and Easter's visitors, was in full flow to-day, and would be for more than a week to come; the two maids were hard at it above. Ward, who did not disdain to labour with his own hands, was at the house, busy at some mysterious business in the brew-house, coat off, shirt-sleeves stripped up to elbow, plunging at that moment something or other into the boiling water of the furnace.

"How I could have let them remain up so long in this state, I can't think," said Miss Betty to herself, arresting her employments, scissors in hand, to regard the dreary curtains. She had drawn the table towards her from the middle of the room, and the heavy work was upon it. Susan came in to impart some domestic news.

"Ward says there's a rare talk in the town about the finding of that box, missis," cried she, when she had concluded it. "My! how bad them curtains look, now they're down!"

Servants were on more familiar terms with their mistresses in those days without meaning, or showing, any disrespect; identifying themselves, as it were, with the family and its interests. Susan, a plump, red-cheeked young woman turned thirty, had been housemaid in her present place for seven years. She had promised a baker's head man to marry him, but never could be got to fix the day. In winter she'd say to him, "Wait till summer"; and when summer came, she'd say, "Wait till winter." Miss Betty commended her prudence.

"Yes," said she now, in answer to the girl, "I've been wondering how we could have kept them up so long; they are not fit for much, I'm afraid, save the rag-bag. Chintz will make the room look much nicer."

As Susan left the parlour, Captain Cockermuth entered it, a farmer with him

who had come in from Hallow to the Wednesday's market. The captain's delighted excitement at the finding of the box had not at all subsided; he had dreamt of it, he talked of it, he pinned every acquaintance he could pick up this morning and brought him in to see the box of gold. Independently of its being a very great satisfaction to have had the old mysterious loss cleared up, the sixty guineas would be a huge boon to the captain's pocket.

"But how was it that none of you ever found it, if it remained all this while in the pigeon-hole?" cried the wondering farmer, bending over the little round box of guineas, which the captain placed upon the table open, the lid by its side.

"Well, we didn't find it, that's all I know; or poor Philip, either," said Captain Cockermuth.

The farmer took his departure. As the captain was showing him to the front-door, another gentleman came bustling in. It was Thomas Chance, the lawyer, father of the young man who had been the previous night with Samson Dene. He and Lawyer Cockermuth were engaged together just then in some complicated, private, and very disagreeable business, each acting for a separate client, who were the defendants against a great wrong—or what they thought was one.

"Come in, Chance, and take a look at my box of guineas, resuscitated from the grave," cried the captain, joyously. "You can go into the office to John afterwards."

"Well, I've hardly time this morning," answered Mr. Chance, turning, though, into the parlour and shaking hands with Miss Betty. "Austin told me it was found."

Now it happened that Lawyer Cockermuth came then into the parlour himself, to get something from his private desk-table which stood there. When the box had been discussed, Mr. Chance took a letter from his pocket and placed it in his brother practitioner's hands.

"What do you think of that?" he asked. "I got it by post this morning."

"Think! why, that is of vital importance," said Mr. Cockermuth when he had read it.

"Yes; not doubt of that. What is to be our next move in answer to it?" asked the other.

Seeing they were plunging into business, the captain strolled away to the front-door, which stood open all day, for the convenience of those coming to the office, and remained there whistling, his hands in his pockets, on the lookout for somebody else to bring in. He had put the lid on the box of guineas, and left the box on the table.

"I should like to take a copy of this letter," said Mr. Cockermuth to the other lawyer.

"Well, you can take it," answered Chance. "Mind who does it, though—Parslet, or somebody else that's confidential. Don't let it go into the office."

"You are wanted, sir," said Mr. Dene, from the door.

"Who is it?" asked his master.

"Mr. Chamberlain. He says he is in a hurry."

"I'm coming. Here, Dene!" he called out as the latter was turning away: and young Dene came back again.

"Sit down here, now, and take a copy of this letter," cried the lawyer, rapidly drawing out and opening the little writing-desk table that stood against the wall at the back of the room. "Here's pen, ink and paper, all ready: the letter is confidential, you perceive."

He went out of the room as he spoke, Mr. Chance with him; and Sam Dene sat down to commence his task, after exchanging a few words with Miss Betty, with whom he was on good terms.

"Charles makes as much fuss over this little box as if it were filled with diamonds from Golconda, instead of guineas," remarked she, pointing with her scissors to the box, which stood near her on the table, to direct the young man's attention to it. "I don't know how many folks he has not brought in already to have a look at it."

"Well, it was a capital find, Miss Betty; one to be proud of," answered Sam, settling to his work.

For some little time nothing was heard but the scratching of Mr. Dene's pen and the clicking of Miss Betty's scissors. Her task was nearing completion. A few minutes more, and the last click was given, the last bit of the braid was off. "And I'm glad of it," cried she aloud, flinging the end of the curtain on the top of the rest.

"This braid will do again for something or other," considered Miss Betty, as she began to wind it upon an old book. "It was put on fresh only three or four years ago. Well brushed, it will look almost like new."

Again Susan opened the door. "Miss Betty, here's the man come with the chintz: five or six rolls of it for you to choose from," cried she. "Shall he come in here?"

Miss Betty was about to say Yes, but stopped and said No, instead. The commotion of holding up the chintzes to the light, to judge of their different merits, might disturb Mr. Dene; and she knew better than to interrupt business.

"Let him take them to the room where they are to hang, Susan; we can judge best there."

Tossing the braid to Susan, who stood waiting at the door, Miss Betty hastily took up her curtains, and Susan held the door open for her mistress to pass through.

Choosing chintz for window-curtains takes some time; as everybody knows whose fancy is erratic. And how long Miss Betty and Susan and the young man from the chintz-mart had been doubting and deciding and doubting again, did not quite appear, when Captain Cockermuth's voice was heard ascending from below.

"Betty! Are you upstairs, Betty?"

"Yes, I'm here," she called back, crossing to the door to speak. "Do you want me, Charles?"

"Where have you put the box?"

"What box?"

"The box of guineas."

"It is on the table."

"It is not on the table. I can't see it anywhere."

"It was on the table when I left the parlour. I did not touch it. Ask Mr. Dene where it is: I left him there."

"Mr. Dene's not here. I wish you'd come down."

"Very well; I'll come in a minute or two," concluded Miss Betty, going back to the chintzes.

"Why, I saw that box on the table as I shut the door after you had come out, ma'am," observed Susan, who had listened to the colloquy.

"So did I," said Miss Betty; "it was the very last thing my eyes fell on. If young Mr. Dene finished what he was about and left the parlour, I dare say he put the box up somewhere for safety. I think, Susan, we must fix upon this light pea-green with the rose-buds running up it. It matches the paper: and the light coming through it takes quite a nice shade."

A little more indecision yet; and yet a little more, as to whether the curtains should be lined, or not, and then Miss Cockermuth went downstairs. The captain was pacing the passage to and fro impatiently.

"Now then, Betty, where's my box?"

"But how am I to know where the box is, Charles, if it's not on the table?" she remonstrated, turning into the parlour, where two friends of the captain's waited to be regaled with the sight of the recovered treasure. "I had to go upstairs with the young man who brought the chintzes; and I left the box here"—indicating the exact spot on the table. "It was where you left it yourself. I did not touch it at all."

She shook hands with the visitors. Captain Cockermuth looked gloomy—as if he were at sea and had lost his reckoning.

"If you had to leave the room, why didn't you put the box up?" asked he. "A box full of guineas shouldn't be left alone in an empty room."

"But Mr. Dene was in the room; he sat at the desk there, copying a letter for John. As to why didn't I put the box up, it was not my place to do so that I know of. You were about yourself, Charles—only at the front-door, I suppose."

Captain Cockermuth was aware that he had not been entirely at the front-door. Two or three times he had crossed over to hold a chat with acquaintances on the other side the way; had strolled with one of them nearly up to Salt Lane and back. Upon catching hold of these two gentlemen, now brought in, he had found the parlour empty of occupants and the box not to be seen.

"Well, this is a nice thing—that a man can't put his hand upon his own property when he wants to, or hear where it is!" grumbled he. "And what business on earth had Dene to meddle with the box?"

"To put it in safety—if he did meddle with it, and a sensible thing to do," retorted Miss Betty, who did not like to be scolded unjustly. "Just like you, Charles, making a fuss over nothing! Why don't you go and ask young Dene where it is?"

"Young Dene is not in. And John's not in. Nobody is in but Parslet; and he

does not know anything about it. I must say, Betty, you manage the house nicely!" concluded the captain, ironically, giving way to his temper.

This was, perhaps the reader may think, commotion enough "over nothing," as Miss Betty put it. But it was not much as compared with the commotion which set in later. When Mr. Cockermuth came in, he denied all knowledge of it, and Sam Dene was impatiently waited for.

It was past two o'clock when he returned, for he had been home to dinner. The good-looking young fellow turned in at the front-door with a fleet step, and encountered Captain Cockermuth, who attacked him hotly, demanding what he had done with the box.

"Ah," said Sam, lightly and coolly, "Parslet said you were looking for it." Mr. Parslet had in fact mentioned it at home over his dinner.

"Well, where is it?" said the captain. "Where did you put it?"

"I?" cried young Dene. "Not anywhere. Should I be likely to touch the box, sir? I saw the box on that table while I was copying a letter for Mr. Cockermuth; that's all I know of it."

The captain turned red, and pale, and red again. "Do you mean to tell me to my face, Mr. Dene, that the box is *gone*?"

"I'm sure I don't know," said Sam in the easiest of all easy tones. "It seems to be gone."

The box was gone. Gone once more with all its golden guineas. It could not be found anywhere; in the house or out of the house, upstairs or down. The captain searched frantically, the others helped him, but no trace of it could be found.

At first it was impossible to believe it. That this self-same box should mysteriously have vanished a second time, seemed to be too marvellous for fact. But it was true.

Nobody would admit a share in the responsibility. The captain left the box safe amidst (as he put it) a room full of people: Miss Betty considered that she left it equally safe, with Mr. Dene seated at the writing-table, and the captain dodging (as *she* put it) in and out. Mr. Cockermuth had not entered the parlour since he left it, when called to Mr. Chamberlain, with whom he had gone out. Sam Dene reiterated that he had not meddled with the box; no, nor thought about it.

Sam's account, briefly given, was this. After finishing copying the letter, he closed the little table-desk and pushed it back to its place against the wall, and had carried the letter and the copy into the office. Finding Mr. Cockermuth was not there, he locked them up in his own desk, having to go to the Guildhall upon some business. The business there took up some time, in fact until past one o'clock, and he then went home to dinner.

"And did you consider it right, Sam Dene, to leave a valuable box like that on the table, unguarded?" demanded Captain Cockermuth, as they all stood together in the parlour, after questioning Sam; and the captain had been looking so fierce and speaking so sharply that it might be thought he was taking Sam for the thief, off-hand.

"To tell the truth, captain, I never thought of the box," answered Sam. "I might not have noticed that the box was in the room at all but for Miss Betty's drawing my attention to it. After that, I grew so much interested in the letter I was copying (for I know all about the cause, as Mr. Cockermuth is aware, and it was curious news) that I forgot everything else."

Lawyer Cockermuth nodded to confirm this. The captain went on:

"Betty drew your attention to it, did she? Why did she draw it? In what way?"

"Well, she remarked that you made as much fuss over that box as if it were filled with diamonds," replied the young man, glad to pay out the captain for his angry and dictatorial tone. But the captain was in truth beginning to entertain a very ominous suspicion.

"Do you wish to deny, Samson Dene, that my sister Betty left that box on the table when she quitted the room?"

"Why, who does?" cried Sam. "When Miss Betty says she left the box on the table, of course she did leave it. She must know. Susan, it seems, also saw that it was left there."

"And you could see that box of guineas standing stark staring on the table, and come out of the room and leave it to its fate!" foamed the captain. "Instead of giving me a call to say nobody was on guard here!"

"I didn't see it," returned Sam. "There's no doubt it was there, but I did not see it. I never looked towards the table as I came out, that I know of. The table, as I dare say you remember, was not in its usual place; it was up there by the window. The box had gone clean out of my thoughts."

"Well, Mr. Dene, my impression is *that you have got the box*," cried the angry captain.

"Oh, is it!" returned Sam, with supreme good humour, and just the least suspicion of a laugh. "A box like that would be uncommonly useful to me."

"I expect, young man, the guineas would!"

"Right you are, captain."

But Captain Cockermuth regarded this mocking pleasantry as particularly ill-timed. *He believed the young man was putting it on to divert suspicion from himself.*

"Who did take the box?" questioned he. "Tell me that."

"I wish I could, sir."

"How could the box vanish off the table unless it was taken, I ask you?"

"That's a puzzling question," coolly rejoined Sam. "It was too heavy for the rats, I expect."

"Oh, dear, but we have no rats in the house," cried Miss Betty. "I wish we had, I'm sure—and could find the box in their holes." She was feeling tolerably uncomfortable. Placid and easy in a general way, serious worry always upset her considerably.

Captain Cockermuth's suspicions were becoming certainties. The previous night, when his brother had been telling him various items of news of the old town, as they sat confidentially over the fire after Miss Betty had gone up to bed, Mr. Cockermuth chanced to mention the fact that young Dene had been

making a few debts. Not speaking in any ill-natured spirit, quite the contrary, for he liked the young man amazingly. Only a few, he continued; thoughtless young men would do so; and he had given him a lecture. And then he laughingly added the information that Mr. Jacobson had imparted to him twelve months ago, in their mutual friendship—of the debts Sam had made in London.

No sensible person can be surprised that Charles Cockermuth recalled this now. It rankled in his mind. Had Sam Dene taken the box of guineas to satisfy these debts contracted during the past year at Worcester? It looked like it. And the longer the captain dwelt on it, the more and more likely it grew to look.

All the afternoon the search was kept up by the captain. Not an individual article in the parlour but was turned inside out; he wanted to have the carpet up. His brother and Sam Dene had returned to their work in the office as usual. The captain was getting to feel like a raging bear; three times Miss Betty had to stop him in a dreadful fit of swearing; and when dinner-time came he could not eat. It was a beautiful slice of Severn salmon, which had its price, I can tell you, in Worcester then, and minced veal, and a jam tart, all of which dishes Charles Cockermuth especially favoured. But the loss of the sixty guineas did away with his appetite. Mr. Cockermuth, who took the loss very coolly, laughed at him.

The laughing did not mend the captain's temper: neither did the hearing that Sam Dene had departed for home as usual at five o'clock. Had Sam been innocent, he would at least have come to the parlour and inquired whether the box was found, instead of sneaking off home to tea.

Fretting and fuming, raging and stamping, disturbing the parlour's peace and his own, strode Charles Cockermuth. His good-humoured brother John bore it for an hour or two, and then told him he might as well go outside and stamp on the pavement for a bit.

"I will," said Charles. Catching up his hat, saying nothing to anybody, he strode off to see the sergeant of police—Dutton—and laid the case concisely before him: The box of guineas was on the table where his sister sat at work; her work being at one end, the box at the other. Sam Dene was also in the room, copying a letter at the writing-table. Miss Betty was called upstairs; she went, leaving the box on the table. It was the last thing she saw as she left the room; the servant, who had come to call her, also saw it standing there. Presently young Dene also left the room and the house; and from that moment the box was never seen.

"What do you make of that, Mr. Dutton?" summed up Captain Cockermuth.

"Am I to understand that no other person entered the room after Mr. Dene quitted it?" inquired the sergeant.

"Not a soul. I can testify to that myself."

"Then it looks as though Mr. Dene must have taken the box."

"Just so," assented the complainant, triumphantly. "And I shall give him into custody for stealing it."

Mr. Dutton considered. His judgment was cool; the captain's hot. He thought there might be ins and outs in this affair that had not yet come to the surface.

Besides that, he knew young Dene, and did not much fancy him the sort of individual likely to do a thing of this kind.

"Captain Cockermuth," said he, "I think it might be best for me to come up to the house and see a bit into the matter personally, before proceeding to extreme measures. We experienced officers have a way of turning up scraps of evidence that other people would never look at. Perhaps, after all, the box is only mislaid."

"But I tell you it's *lost*," said the captain. "Clean gone. Can't be found high or low."

"Well, if that same black box is lost again, I can only say it is the oddest case I ever heard of. One would think the box had a demon inside it."

"No, sergeant, you are wrong there. The demon's inside him that took it. Listen while I whisper something in your ear—that young Dene is over head and ears in debt: he has debts here, debts there, debts everywhere. For some little time now, as I chance to know, he has been at his very wits' end to think where or how he could pick up some money to satisfy the most pressing; fit to die of fear, lest they should travel to the knowledge of his uncle at Elm Farm."

"*Is* it so?" exclaimed Mr. Dutton, severely. And his face changed, and his opinion also. "Are you sure of this, sir?"

"Well, my informant was my brother; so you may judge whether it is likely to be correct or not," said the captain. "But, if you think it best to make some inquiries at the house, come with me now and do so."

They walked to Foregate together. The sergeant looked a little at the features of the parlour, where the loss had taken place, and heard what Miss Betty had to say, and questioned Susan. This did not help the suspicion thrown on Sam Dene, saving in one point—their joint testimony that he and the box were left alone in the room together.

Mr. Cockermuth had gone out, so the sergeant did not see him: but, as he was not within doors when the loss occurred, he could not have aided the investigation in any way.

"Well, Dutton, what do you think now?" asked Captain Cockermuth, strolling down the street with the sergeant when he departed.

"I confess my visit has not helped me much," said Dutton, a slow-speaking man, given to be cautious. "If nobody entered the room between the time when Miss Cockermuth left it and you entered it, why then, sir, there's only young Dene to fall back upon."

"I tell you nobody did enter it," cried the choleric captain; "or *could*, without my seeing them. I stood at the front-door. Ward was busy at the house that morning, dodging perpetually across the top of the passage, between the kitchen and brew-house: he, too, is sure no stranger could have come in without being seen by him."

"Did you see young Dene leave the room, sir?"

"I did. Hearing somebody come out of the parlour, I looked round and saw it was young Dene with some papers in his hand. He went into the office for a minute or two, and then passed me, remarking, with all the impudence in

life, that he was going to the town hall. He must have had my box in his pocket then."

"A pity but you had gone into the parlour at once, captain," remarked the sergeant. "If only to put the box in safety—provided it was there."

"But I thought it was safe. I thought my sister was there. I did go in almost directly."

"And you never stirred from the door—from first to last?"

"I don't say that. When I first stood there I strolled about a little, talking with one person and another. *But I did not stir from the door after I saw Sam Dene leave the parlour.* And I do not think five minutes elapsed before I went in. Not more than five, I am quite certain. What are you thinking about, Dutton? —you don't seem to take me."

"I take you well enough, sir, and all you say. But what is puzzling me in the matter is this; strikes me as strange, in fact: that Mr. Dene should do the thing (allowing that he has done it) in so open and barefaced a manner, laying himself open to immediate suspicion. Left alone in the room with the box by Miss Betty, he must know that if, when he left it, the box vanished with him, only one inference would be drawn. Most thieves exercise some caution."

"Not when they are as hard up as Dene is. Impudence with them is the order of the day, and often carries luck with it. Nothing risk, nothing win, they cry, and they *do* risk—and win. Dene has got my box, sergeant."

"Well, sir, it looks dark against him; almost *too* dark; and if you decide to give him into custody, of course we have only too—— Good-evening, Badger!"

They had strolled as far as the Cross, and were standing on the wide pavement in front of St. Nicholas' Church, about to part, when that respectable gentleman, Jonas Badger, passed by. A thought struck the captain. He knew the man was a money-lender in a private way.

"Here, Badger, stop a minute," he hastily cried. "I want to ask you a question about young Dene—my brother's clerk, you know. Does he owe you money? —Much?"

Mr. Badger, wary by nature and by habit, glanced first at the questioner, and then at the police-sergeant, and did not answer. Whereupon Captain Cockermuth, as an excuse for his curiosity, plunged into the history of what had occurred: the finding of the box of guineas yesterday and the losing it again to-day, and the doubt of Sam.

Mr. Badger listened with interest; for the news of that marvellous find had not yet reached his ears. He had been shut up in his office all the morning, very busy over his account-books; and in the afternoon had walked over to Kempsey, where he had a client or two, getting back only in time for tea.

"That long-lost box of guineas come to light at last!" he exclaimed. "What an extraordinary thing! And Mr. Dene is suspected of—— Why, good gracious!" he broke off in fresh astonishment. "I have just seen him with a guinea in his pocket!"

"Seen a guinea in Sam Dene's pocket!" cried Captain Cockermuth, turning yellow as the gas-flame under which they were standing.

"Why yes, I have. It was—"

But there Mr. Badger came to a full stop. It had suddenly struck him that he might be doing harm to Sam Dene; and the rule of his life was not to harm any one, or to make an enemy, if his own interest allowed him to avoid it.

"I won't say any more, Captain Cockermuth. It is no business of mine."

But here Mr. Sergeant Dutton came to the fore. "You must, Badger. You must say all you know that bears upon the affair; the law demands it of you. What about the guinea?"

"Well, if you force me to do so—putting it in that way," returned the man, driven into a corner.

Mr. Badger had just been down to Edgar Street to pay another visit to Sam. Not to torment him; he did not do that more than he could help; but simply to say he would accept smaller instalments for the liquidation of his debt—which of course meant giving to Sam a longer time to pay the whole in. This evening he was admitted to Sam's sitting-room. During their short conversation, Sam, searching impatiently for a pencil in his waistcoat-pocket, drew out with it a few coins in silver money, and one coin in gold. Mr. Badger's hungry eyes saw that it was an old guinea. These particulars he now imparted.

"What did he *say* about the guinea?" cried Captain Cockermuth, his own eyes glaring.

"Not a word," said Badger; "neither did I. He slipped it back into his pocket."

"I hope you think there's some proof to go upon *now*," were Charles Cockermuth's last words to the police-officer as he wished him good-night.

On the following morning, Sam Dene was apprehended, and taken before the magistrates. Beyond being formally charged, very little was done; Miss Betty was in bed with a sick headache, brought on by the worry, and could not appear to give evidence; so he was remanded on bail until Saturday.

3

I'm sure you might have thought all his rick-yards were on fire by the way old Jacobson came bursting in. It was Saturday morning, and we were at breakfast at Dyke Manor. He had run every step of the way from Elm Farm, two miles nearly, not having patience to wait for his gig, and came in all excitement, the *Worcester Herald* in his hand. The Squire started from his chair; Mrs. Todhetley, then in the act of pouring out a cup of coffee, let it flow over on to the tablecloth.

"What on earth's amiss, Jacobson?" cried the Squire.

"Ay, what's amiss," stuttered Jacobson in answer; "*this* is amiss," holding out the newspaper. "I'll prosecute the editor as sure as I'm a living man. It is a conspiracy got up to sell it; a concocted lie. It can't be anything else, you know, Todhetley. And I want you to go off with me to Worcester. The gig's following me."

When we had somewhat collected our senses, and could look at the newspaper, there was the account as large as life. Samson Reginald Dene had been had up

before the magistrates on Thursday morning on a charge of stealing a small box of carved ebony, containing sixty guineas in gold, from the dwelling house of Lawyer Cockermuth; and he was to be brought up again that day, Saturday, for examination.

"A pretty thing this is to see, when a man opens his weekly newspaper at his breakfast-table!" gasped Jacobson, flicking the report with his angry finger. "I'll have the law of them—accusing *my* nephew of such a thing as that! You'll go with me, Squire!"

"Go! of course I'll go!" returned the Squire, in his hot partisanship. "We were going to Worcester, any way; I've things to do there. Poor Sam! Hanging would be too good for the printers of that newspaper, Jacobson."

Mr. Jacobson's gig was heard driving up to the gate at railroad speed; and soon our own carriage was ready. Old Jacobson sat with the Squire, I behind with Giles; the other groom, Blossom, drove Tod in the gig; and away we went in the blustering March wind. Many people, farmers and others, were on the road, riding or driving to Worcester market.

Well, we found it was true. And not the mistake of the newspapers: they had but reported what passed before the magistrates at the town hall.

The first person we saw was Miss Cockermuth. She was in a fine way, not knowing what to think or believe, and sat in the parlour in that soft green gown of twilled silk (that might have been a relic of the silk made in the time of the Queen of Sheba), her cap and front all awry. Rumour said old Jacobson had been a sweetheart of hers in their young days; but I'm sure I don't know. Any way they were very friendly with one another, and she sometimes called him "Frederick." He sat down by her on the horsehair sofa, and we took chairs.

She recounted the circumstances (ramblingly) from beginning to end. Not that the end had come yet by a long way. And—there it was, she wound up, when the narrative was over: the box had disappeared, just for all the world as mysteriously as it disappeared in the days gone by.

Mr. Jacobson had listened patiently. He was a fine, upright man, with a healthy colour and bright dark eyes. He wore a blue frockcoat to-day with metal buttons, and top-boots. As yet he did not see how they had got up grounds for accusing Sam, and he said so.

"To be sure," cried the Squire. "How's that, Miss Betty?"

"Why, it's this way," said Miss Betty—"that nobody was here in the parlour but Sam when the box vanished. It is my brother Charles who has done it all; he is so passionate, you know. John has properly quarrelled with him for it."

"It is not possible, you know, Miss Betty, that Sam Dene could have done it," struck in Tod, who was boiling over with rage at the whole thing. "Some thief must have stolen in at the street door when Sam had left the room."

"Well, no, that could hardly have been, seeing that Charles never left the street door after that," returned Miss Betty, mildly. "It appears to be a certain fact that not a soul entered the room after the young man left it. And there lies the puzzle of it."

Putting it to be as Miss Betty put it—and I may as well say here that nothing

turned up, then or later, to change the opinion—it looked rather suspicious for Sam Dene. I think the Squire saw it.

"I suppose you are sure the box was on the table when you left the room, Miss Betty?" said he.

"Why, of course I am sure, Squire," she answered. "It was the last thing my eyes fell on; for, as I went through the door, I glanced back to see that I had left the table tidy. Susan can bear witness to that. Dutton, the police-sergeant, thinks some demon of mischief must be in that box—meaning the deuce, you know. Upon my word it looks like it."

Susan came in with some glasses and ale as Miss Betty spoke, and confirmed the testimony—which did not need confirmation. As she closed the parlour-door, she said, after her mistress had passed out, she noticed the box standing on the table.

"Is Sam here to-day—in the office?" asked Mr. Jacobson.

"Oh, my goodness, no," cried Miss Betty in a fluster. "Why, Frederick, he has not been here since Thursday, when they had him up at the Guildhall. He couldn't well come while the charge is hanging over him."

"Then I think we had better go out to find Sam, and hear what he has to say," observed Mr. Jacobson, drinking up his glass of ale.

"Yes, do," said Miss Betty. "Tell poor Sam I'm as sorry as I can be—pestered almost out of my mind over it. And as to their having found one of the guineas in his pocket, please just mention to him that I say it might have slipped in accidentally."

"One of the guineas found in Sam's pocket!" exclaimed Mr. Jacobson, taken aback.

"Well, I hear so," responded Miss Betty. "The police searched him, you see."

As the Squire and Mr. Jacobson went out, Mr. Cockermuth was coming in. They all turned into the office together, while we made a rush to Sam Dene's lodgings in Edgar Street: as much of a rush, at least, as the Saturday's streets would let us make. Sam was out, the young servant said when we got there, and while parleying with her Mrs. Parslet opened her sitting-room door.

"I do not suppose Mr. Dene will be long," she said. "He has to appear at the town hall this morning, and I think it likely he will come home first. Will you walk in and wait?"

She handed us into her parlour, where she had been busy, marking sheets and pillow-cases and towels with "prepared" ink; the table was covered with them. Tod began telling her that Mr. Jacobson was at Worcester, and went on to say what a shame it was that Sam Dene should be accused of this thing.

"We consider it so," said Mrs. Parslet, who was a capable, pleasant-speaking woman, tall and slender. "My husband says it has upset Mr. Cockermuth more than anything that has occurred for years past. He tells his brother that he should have had it investigated privately, not having given Mr. Dene into custody."

"Then why did he let him do it, Mrs. Parslet?"

She looked at Tod, as if surprised at the question. "Mr. Cockermuth knew

nothing of it; you may be sure of that. Captain Cockermuth had the young man at the Guildhall and was preferring the charge, before Mr. Cockermuth heard a word of what was agate. Certainly that is a most mysterious box! It seems fated to give trouble."

At this moment the door opened, and a young lady came into the parlour. It was Maria. What a nice face she had!—what sweet, thoughtful eyes!—what gentle manners! Sam's friends in the town were accusing him of being in love with her—and small blame to him.

But Sam did not appear to be coming home, and time was getting on. Tod decided not to wait longer, and said good-morning.

Flying back along High Street, we caught sight of the tray of Dublin buns, just put fresh on the counter in Rousse's shop, and made as good a feast as time allowed. Some people called them Doubling buns (from their shape, I take it), and I don't know to this day which was right.

Away with fleet foot again, past the bustle round the town hall, and market house, till we came to the next confectioner's and saw the apple-tarts. Perhaps somebody remembers yet how delicious those apple-tarts were. Bounding in, we began upon them.

While the feast was in progress, Sam Dene went by, walking very fast. We dashed out to catch him. Good Mrs. Mountford chanced to be in the shop and knew us, or they might have thought we were decamping without payment.

Sam Dene, in answer to Tod's hasty questions, went into a passion; swearing at the world in general, and Captain Cockermuth in particular, as freely as though the justices, then taking their places in the Guildhall, were not as good as within earshot.

"It is a fearful shame, Todhetley!—to bring such a charge against me, and to lug me up to the criminal bar like a felon. Worse than all, to let it go forth to the town and county in to-day's glaring newspapers that I, Sam Dene, am a common thief!"

"Of course it is a fearful shame, Sam—it's infamous, and all your friends know it is," cried Tod, with eager sympathy. "My father wishes he could hang the printers. I say, what do you think has become of the box?"

"Become of it!—why, that blundering Charles Cockermuth has got it. He was off his head with excitement at its being found. He must have come into the room and put it somewhere and forgotten it: or else he put it into his pocket and got robbed of it in the street. That's what I think. Quite off his head, I give you my word."

"And what fable is it the wretches have got up about finding one of the guineas in your pocket, Sam?"

"Oh, bother that! It was my own guinea. I swear it—there! I can't stay now," went on Sam, striding off down High Street. "I am due at the town hall this minute; only out on bail. You'll come with me."

"You go in and pay for the tarts, Johnny," called back Tod, as he put his arm within Sam Dene's. I looked in, pitched a shilling on the counter, said I didn't know how many we had eaten; perhaps ten; and that I couldn't wait for change.

Crushing my way amidst the market women and their baskets in the Guildhall yard, I came upon Austin Chance. His father held some post connected with the law, as administered there, and Austin said he would get me in.

"Can it be true that the police found one of the guineas about him?" I asked.

Chance pulled a long face. "It's true they found one when they searched him—"

"What right had they to search him?"

"Well, I don't know," said Austin, laughing a little; "they did it. To see perhaps whether all the guineas were about him. And I am afraid, Johnny Ludlow, that the finding of that guinea will make it rather hard for Sam. It is said that Maria Parslet can prove the guinea was Sam's own, and that my father has had a summons served on her to appear here to-day. He has taken Sam's case in hand; but he is closer than wax, and tells me nothing."

"You don't think he can have stolen the box, Chance?"

"I don't. I shouldn't think him capable of anything so mean; let alone the danger of it. Not but that there are circumstances in the case that tell uncommonly strong against him. And where the deuce the box can have got to, otherwise, is more than mortal man can guess at. Come along."

4

Not for a long while had Worcester been stirred as it was over this affair of Samson Dene's. What with the curious discovery of the box of guineas after its mysterious disappearance of years, and then its second no less mysterious loss, with the suspicion that Sam Dene stole it, the Faithful City was so excited as hardly to know whether it stood on its head or its heels.

When the police searched the prisoner on Thursday morning, after taking him into custody, and found the guinea upon him (having been told that he had one about him), his guilt was thought to be as good as proved. Sam said the guinea was his own, an heirloom, and stood to this so indignantly resolute that the police let him have it back. But now, what did Sam go and do? When released upon bail by the magistrates—to come up again on the Saturday—he went straight off to a silversmith's, had a hole stamped in the guinea and hung it to his watch-chain across his waistcoat, that the public might feast their eyes upon it. It was in this spirit of defiance—or, as the town called it, bravado—that he met the charge. His lodgings had been searched for the rest of the guineas, but they were not found.

The hour for the Saturday's examination—twelve o'clock—was striking, as I struggled my way with Austin Chance through the crush round the Guildhall. But that Austin's father was a man of consequence with the door-keepers, we should not have got in at all.

The accused, arraigned by his full name, Samson Reginald Dene, stood in the place allotted to prisoners, cold defiance on his handsome face. As near to him as might be permitted, stood Tod, just as defiant as he. Captain Charles Cockermuth, a third in defiance, stood opposite to prosecute; while Lawyer

Cockermuth, who came in with Sam's uncle, Mr. Jacobson, openly wished his brother at Hanover. Squire Todhetley, being a county magistrate, sat on the bench with the City magnates, but not to interfere.

The proceedings began. Captain Cockermuth related how the little box, his property, containing sixty golden guineas, was left on the table in a sitting-room in his brother's house, the accused being the only person in the room at the time, and that the box disappeared. He, himself (standing at the front-door), saw the accused quit the room; he went into it almost immediately, but the box was gone. He swore that no person entered the room after the prisoner left it.

Miss Betty Cockermuth, flustered and red, appeared next. She testified that she was in the room nearly all the morning, the little box being upon the table; when she left the room, Mr. Dene remained in it alone, copying a letter for her brother; the box was still on the table. Susan Edwards, housemaid at Lawyer Cockermuth's, spoke to the same fact. It was she who had fetched her mistress out, and she saw the box standing upon the table.

The accused was asked by one of the magistrates what he had to say to this. He answered, speaking freely, that he had nothing to say in contradiction, except that he did not know what became of the box.

"Did you see the box on the table?" asked the lawyer on the opposite side, Mr. Standup.

"I saw it there when I first went into the room. Miss Betty made a remark about the box, which drew my attention to it. I was sitting at the far end of the room, at Mr. Cockermuth's little desk-table. I did not notice the box afterwards."

"Did you not see it there after Miss Cockermuth left the room?"

"No, I did not; not that I remember," answered Sam. "Truth to say, I never thought about it. My attention was confined to the letter I was copying, to the exclusion of everything else."

"Did any one come into the room after Miss Cockermuth left it?"

"No one came into it. Somebody opened the door and looked in."

This was fresh news. The town hall pricked up its ears.

"I do not know who it was," added Sam. "My head was bent over my writing, when the door opened quickly, and as quickly shut again. I supposed somebody had looked in to see if Mr. or Miss Cockermuth was there, and had retreated on finding they were not."

"Could that person, whomsoever it might be, have advanced to the table and taken the box?" asked the chief of the magistrates.

"No, sir. For certain, no!"—and Sam's tone here, he best knew why, was aggravatingly defiant. "The person might have put his head in—and no doubt did—but he did not set a foot inside the room."

Captain Cockermuth was asked about this: whether he observed any one go to the parlour and look in. He protested till he was nearly blue with rage (for he regarded it as Sam's invention), that such a thing never took place, that no one whatever went near the parlour-door.

Next came up the question of the guinea, which was hanging from his

watch-guard, shining and bold as if it had been brass. Sam had been questioned about this by the justices on Thursday, and his statement in answer to them was just as bold as the coin.

The guinea had been given him by his late father's uncle, old Thomas Dene, who had jokingly enjoined him never to change it, always to keep it by him, and then he would never be without money. Sam had kept it; kept it from that time to this. He kept it in the pocket of an old-fashioned leather case, which contained some letters from his father, and two or three other things he valued. No, he was not in the habit of getting the guinea out to look at, he had retorted to a little badgering; had not looked at it (or at the case either, which lay in the bottom of his trunk) for months and months—yes, it might be years, for all he recollected. But on the Tuesday evening, when talking with Miss Parslet about guineas, he fetched it to show to her; and slipped it into his pocket afterwards, where the police found it on the Thursday. This was the substance of his first answer, and he repeated it now.

"Do you know who is said to be the father of lies, young man?" asked Justice Whitewicker in a solemn tone, suspecting that the prisoner was telling an out-and-out fable.

"I have heard," answered Sam. "Have never seen him myself. Perhaps you have, sir." At which a titter went round the court, and it put his worship's back up. Sam went on to say that he had often thought of taking his guinea into wear, and had now done it. And he gave the guinea a flick in the face of us all.

Evidently little good could come of a hardened criminal like this; and Justice Whitewicker, who thought nothing on earth so grand as the sound of his own voice from the bench, gave Sam a piece of his mind. In the midst of this a stir arose at the appearance of Maria Parslet. Mr. Chance led her in; her father, sad and shrinking as usual, walked behind them. Lawyer Cockermuth—and I liked him for it—made a place for his clerk next to himself. Maria looked modest, gentle, and pretty. She wore black silk, being in slight mourning, and a dainty white bonnet.

Mr. Dene was asked to take tea with them in the parlour on the Tuesday evening, as a matter of convenience, Maria's evidence ran, in answer to questions, and she briefly alluded to the reason why. Whilst waiting together, he and she, for her father to come in, Mr. Dene told her of the finding of the ebony box of guineas at Mr. Cockermuth's. She laughingly remarked that a guinea was an out-of-date coin now, and she was not sure that she had ever seen one. In reply to that, Mr. Dene said he had one by him, given him by an old uncle some years before; and he went upstairs and brought it down to show to her. There could be no mistake, Maria added to Mr. Whitewicker, who wanted to insinuate a word of doubt, and her sweet brown eyes were honest and true as she said it; she had touched the guinea and held it in her hand for some moments.

"Held it and touched it, did you, Miss Parslet?" retorted Lawyer Standup. "Pray what appearance had it?"

"It was a thin, worn coin, sir," replied Maria; "thinner, I think, than a sovereign, but somewhat larger; it seemed to be worn thin at the edge."

"Whose image was on it?—what king's?"

"George the Third's. I noticed that."

"Now, don't you think, young lady, that the accused took this marvellous coin from his pocket, instead of from some receptacle above stairs?" went on Mr. Standup.

"I am quite sure he did not take it from his pocket when before me," answered Maria. "He ran upstairs quickly, saying he would fetch the guinea: he had nothing in his hands then."

Upon this Lawyer Chance inquired of his learned brother why he need waste time in useless questions; begging to remind him that it was not until Wednesday morning the box disappeared, so the prisoner could not well have had any of its contents about him on Tuesday.

"Just let my questions alone, will you," retorted Mr. Standup, with a nod. "I know what I am about. Now, Miss Parslet, please attend to me. Was the guinea you profess to have seen a perfect coin, or was there a hole in it?"

"It was a perfect coin, sir."

"And what became of it?"

"I think Mr. Dene put it in his waistcoat-pocket: I did not particularly notice. Quite close upon that, my father came home, and we sat down to tea. No, sir, nothing was said to my father about the guinea; if it was, I did not hear it. But he and Mr. Dene talked of the box of guineas that had been found."

"Who was it that called while you were at tea?"

"Young Mr. Chance called. We had finished tea then, and Mr. Dene took him upstairs to his own sitting-room."

"I am not asking you about young Mr. Chance; we shall come to him presently," was the rough-toned, but not ill-natured retort. "Somebody else called; who was it?"

Maria, blushing and paling ever since she stood up to the ordeal, grew white now. Mr. Badger had called at the door, she answered, and Mr. Dene went out to speak to him. Worried by Lawyer Standup as to whether he did not come to ask for money, she said she believed so, but she did not hear all they said.

Quiet Mr. Parslet was the next witness. He had to acknowledge that he did hear it. Mr. Badger appeared to be pressing for some money owing to him; could not tell the amount, knew nothing about that. When questioned whether the accused owed him money, Parslet said not a shilling; Mr. Dene had never sought to borrow of him, and had paid his monthly accounts regularly.

Upon that, Mr. Badger was produced; a thin man with a neck as stiff as a poker; who gave his reluctant testimony in a sweet tone of benevolence. Mr. Dene had been borrowing money from him for some time; somewhere about twenty pounds, he thought, was owing now, including interest. He had repeatedly asked for its repayment, but only got put off with (as he believed) lame excuses. Had certainly gone to ask for it on the Tuesday evening; was neither loud nor angry, oh dear no; but did tell the accused he thought he could give him some if he would, and did say that he must have a portion of it within a week, or he should apply to Mr. Jacobson, of Elm Farm. Did not really mean

to apply to Mr. Jacobson, had no wish to do any one an injury, but felt vexed at the young man's off-handedness, which looked like indifference. Knew besides that Mr. Dene had other debts.

Now I'll leave you to judge how this evidence struck on the ears of old Jacobson. He leaped to the conclusion that Sam had been going all sorts of ways, as he supposed he went when in London, and might be owing, the mischief only knew how much money; and he shook his fist at Sam across the justice-room.

Mr. Standup next called young Chance, quite to young Chance's surprise; perhaps also to his father's. He was questioned upon no end of things—whether he did not know that the accused was owing a great deal of money, and whether the accused had shown any guinea to him when he was in Edgar Street on the Tuesday night. Austin answered that he believed Mr. Dene owed a little money, not a great deal, so far as he knew; and that he had not seen the guinea or heard of it. And in saying all this, Austin's tone was just as resentfully insolent to Mr. Standup as he dared to make it.

Well, it is of no use to go on categorically with the day's proceedings. When they came to an end, the magistrates conferred pretty hotly in a low tone amongst themselves, some apparently taking up one opinion, as to Sam's guilt, or innocence, and some the other. At length they announced their decision, and it was as follows.

"Although the case undoubtedly presents grave grounds of suspicion against the accused, Samson Reginald Dene—'Very grave indeed,' interjected Mr. Whitewicker, solemnly—we do not consider them to be sufficient to commit him for trial upon; therefore, we give him the benefit of the doubt, and discharge him. Should any further evidence transpire, he can be brought up again."

"It was Maria Parslet's testimony about the guinea that cleared him," whispered the crowd, as they filed out.

And I think it must have been. It was just impossible to doubt her truth, or the earnestness with which she gave it.

Mr. Jacobson "interviewed" Sam, as the Americans say, and the interview was not a loving one. Being in the mood, he said anything that came uppermost. He forbade Sam to appear at Elm Farm again ever, as "long as oak and ash grew"; and he added that as Sam was bent on going to the deuce head foremost, he might do it upon his own means, but that he'd never get any more help from him.

The way the Squire lashed up Bob and Blister when driving home—for, liking Sam hitherto, he was just as much put out as old Jacobson—and the duet they kept together in abuse of his misdeeds, was edifying to hear. Tod laughed; I did not. The gig was given over this return journey to the two grooms.

"I do not believe Sam took the box, sir," I said to old Jacobson, interrupting a fiery oration.

He turned round to stare at me. "What do you say, Johnny Ludlow? *You do not believe he took the box?*"

"Well, to me it seems quite plain that he did not take it. I've hardly ever felt more sure of anything."

"Plain!" struck in the Squire. "How is it plain, Johnny? What grounds do you go upon?"

"I judge by his looks and his tones, sir, when denying it. They are to be trusted."

They did not know whether to laugh or scoff at me. It was Johnny's way, said the Squire; always fancying he could read the riddles in a man's face and voice. But they'd have thrown up their two best market-going hats with glee to be able to think it true.

5

Samson Reginald Dene was relieved of the charge, as it was declared "not proven"; all the same, Samson Reginald Dene was ruined. Worcester said so. During the following week, which was Passion Week, its citizens talked more of him than of their prayers.

Granted that Maria Parslet's testimony had been honestly genuine, a theory cropped up to counteract it. Lawyer Standup had been bold enough to start it at the Saturday's examination: a hundred tongues were repeating it now. Sam Dene, as may be remembered, was present at the finding of the box on Tuesday; he had come up the passage and touched the golden guineas in it with the tips of his fingers; those fingers might have deftly extracted one of the coins. No wonder he could show it to Maria when he went home to tea! Captain Cockermuth admitted that in counting the guineas subsequently he had thought he counted sixty; but, as he knew there were (or ought to be) that number in the box, probably the assumption misled him, causing him to reckon them as sixty when in fact there were only fifty-nine. Which was a bit of logic.

Still, popular opinion was divided. If part of the town judged Sam to be guilty, part believed him to be innocent. A good deal might be said on both sides. To a young man who does not know how to pay his debts from lack of means, and debts that he is afraid of, too, sixty golden guineas may be a great temptation; and people did not shut their eyes to that. It transpired also that Mr. Jacobson, his own uncle, his best friend, had altogether cast Sam off and told him he might now go to the dogs his own way.

Sam resented it all bitterly, and defied the world. Far from giving in or showing any sense of shame, he walked about with an air, his head up, and that brazen guinea dangling in front of him. He actually had the face to appear at college on Good Friday (the congregation looking askance at him), and sat out the cold service of the day: no singing, nor organ, and the little chorister-boys in black surplices instead of white ones.

But the crowning act of boldness was to come. Before Easter week had lapsed into the past, Sam Dene had taken two rooms in a conspicuous part of the town and set-up in practice. A big brass plate on the outer door displayed his name: "Mr. Dene, Attorney-at-law." Sam's friends extolled his courage; Sam's enemies were amazed at his impudence. Captain Cockermuth prophesied that the ceiling

of that office would come tumbling down on its crafty occupant's head: it was *his* gold that was paying for it.

The Cockermuths, like the town, were divided in opinion. Mr. Cockermuth could not believe Sam guilty, although the mystery as to where the box could be puzzled him as few things had ever puzzled him in his life. He would fain have taken Sam back again, had it been a right thing to do. What the captain thought need not be enlarged upon. While Miss Betty felt uncertain; veering now to this belief, now to that, and much distressed either way.

There is one friend in this world that hardly ever deserts us—and that is a mother. Mrs. Dene, a pretty little woman yet, had come flying to Worcester, ready to fight everybody in it on her son's behalf. Sam of course made his own tale good to her; whether it was a true one or not he alone knew, but not an angel from heaven could have stirred her faith in it. She declared that, to her positive knowledge, the old uncle had given Sam the guinea.

It was understood to be Mrs. Dene who advanced the money to Sam to set up with; it was certainly Mrs. Dene who bought a shutting-up bed (at old Ward's), and a gridiron, and a tea-pot, and a three-legged table, and a chair or two, all for the back-room of the little office, that Sam might go into housekeeping on his own account, and live upon sixpence a-day, so to say, until business came in. To look at Sam's hopeful face, he meant to do it, and to live down the scandal.

Looking at the thing impartially, one might perhaps see that Sam was not swayed by impudence in setting-up, so much as by obligation. For what else lay open to him?—no firm would engage him as clerk with that doubt sticking to his coat-tails. He paid some of his debts, and undertook to pay the rest before the year was out. A whisper arose that it was Mrs. Dene who managed this. Sam's adversaries knew better; the funds came out of the ebony box; that, as Charles Cockermuth demonstrated, was as sure as heaven.

But now there occurred one thing that I, Johnny Ludlow, could not understand, and never shall: why Worcester should have turned its back, like an angry drake, upon Maria Parslet. The school, where she was resident teacher, wrote her a cool, polite note, to say she need not trouble herself to return after the Easter recess. That example was followed. Pious individuals looked upon her as a possible story-teller, in danger of going to the bad in Sam's defense, nearly as much as Sam had gone.

It was just a craze. Even Charles Cockermuth said there was no sense in blaming Maria: of course Sam had deceived her (when pretending to show the guinea as his own), just as he deceived other people. Next the town called her "bold" for standing up in the face and eyes of the Guildhall to give her evidence. But how could Maria help that? It was not her own choice: she'd rather have locked herself up in the cellar. Lawyer Chance had burst in upon her that Saturday morning (not ten minutes after we left the house), giving nobody warning, and carried her off imperatively, never saying "Will you, or Won't you." It was not his way.

Placid Miss Betty was indignant when the injustice came to her ears. What

did people mean by it? she wanted to know. She sent for Maria to spend the next Sunday in Foregate Street, and marched with her arm-in-arm to church (St. Nicholas'), morning and evening.

As the days and the weeks passed, commotion gave place to a calm; Sam and his delinquencies were let alone. One cannot be on the grumble for ever. Sam's lines were pretty hard; practice held itself aloof from him; and if he did not live upon the sixpence a-day, he looked at every halfpenny that he had to spend beyond it. His face grew thin, his blue eyes wistful, but he smiled hopefully.

"You keep up young Dene's acquaintance, I perceive," remarked Lawyer Chance to his son one evening as they were finishing dinner, for he had met the two young men together that day.

"Yes: why shouldn't I?" returned Austin.

"Think that charge was a mistaken one, I suppose?"

"Well I do, father. He has affirmed it to me in terms so unmistakable that I can but believe him. Besides, I don't think Dene, as I have always said, is the sort of fellow to turn rogue: I don't indeed."

"Does he get any practice?"

"Very little, I'm afraid."

Mr. Chance was a man with a conscience. On the whole, he felt inclined to think Sam had not helped himself to the guineas, but he was by no means sure of it: like Miss Betty Cockermuth, his opinion veered, now on this side, now on that, like a haunted weathercock. If Sam was not guilty, why, then, Fate had dealt hardly with the young fellow—and what would the end be? These thoughts were running through the lawyer's mind as he talked to his son and sat playing with his bunch of seals, which hung down by a short, thick gold chain, in the old-fashioned manner.

"I should like to say a word to him if he'd come to me," he suddenly cried. "You might go and bring him, Austin."

"What—this evening?" exclaimed Austin.

"Aye; why not? One time's as good as another."

Austin Chance started off promptly for the new office, and found his friend presiding over his own tea-tray in the little back-room; the loaf and butter on the table, and a red herring on the gridiron.

"Hadn't time to get any dinner to-day; too busy," was Sam's apology, given briefly with a flush of the face. "Mr. Chance wants me? Well, I'll come. What is it for?"

"Don't know," replied Austin. And away they went.

The lawyer was standing at the window, his hands in the pockets of his pepper-and-salt trousers, tinkling the shillings and sixpences there. Austin supposed he was not wanted, and shut them in.

"I have been thinking of your case a good bit lately, Sam Dene," began Mr. Chance, giving Sam a seat and sitting down himself; "and I should like to feel, if I can, more at a certainty about it, one way or the other."

"Yes, sir," replied Sam. And you must please to note that manners in those

days had not degenerated to what they are in these. Young men, whether gentle or simple, addressed their elders with respect; young women also. "Yes, sir," replied Sam. "But what do you mean about wishing to feel more at a certainty?"

"When I defended you before the magistrates, I did my best to convince them that you were not guilty: you had assured me you were not: and they discharged you. I believe my arguments and my pleadings went some way with them."

"I have no doubt of it, sir, and I thanked you at the time with all my heart," said Sam warmly. "Some of my enemies were bitter enough against me."

"But you should not speak in that way—calling people your enemies!" reproved the lawyer. "People were only at enmity with you on the score of the offence. Look here, Sam Dene—did you commit it, or did you not?"

Sam stared. Mr. Chance had dropped his voice to a solemn key, his head was pushed forward, gravity sat on his face.

"No, sir. No."

The short answer did not satisfy the lawyer. "Did you filch that box of guineas out of Cockermuth's room; or were you, and are you, as you assert, wholly innocent?" he resumed. "Tell me the truth as before Heaven. Whatever it be, I will shield you still."

Sam rose. "On my sacred word, sir, and before Heaven, I have told nothing but the truth. I did not take or touch the box of guineas. I do not know what became of it."

Mr. Chance regarded Sam in silence. He had known young men, when under a cloud, prevaricate in a most extraordinary and unblushing manner: to look at them and listen to them, one might have said they were fit to be canonized. But he thought truth lay with Sam now.

"Sit down, sit down, Dene," he said. "I am glad to believe you. Where the deuce could the box have got to? It could not take flight through the ceiling up to the clouds, or down to the earth through the floor. *Whose hands took it?*"

"The box went in one of two ways," returned Sam. "If the captain did not fetch it out unconsciously, and lose it in the street, why, somebody must have entered the parlour after I left it and carried off the box. Perhaps the individual who looked into the room when I was sitting there."

"A pity but you had noticed who that was."

"Yes, it is. Look here, Mr. Chance; a thought has more than once struck me—if that person did not come back and take the box, why has he not come forward openly and honestly to avow it was himself who looked in?"

The lawyer gave his head a dissenting shake. "It is a ticklish thing to be mixed up in, he may think, one that he had best keep out of—though he may be innocent as the day. How are you getting on?" he asked, passing abruptly from the subject.

"Oh, middling," replied Sam. "As well, perhaps, as I could expect to get on at first, with all the prejudice abroad against me."

"Earning bread and cheese?"

"Not quite—yet."

"Well, see here, Dene—and this is what I chiefly sent for you to say, if you

could assure me on your conscience you deserved it—I may be able to put some little business in your hands. Petty matters are brought to us that we hardly care to waste time upon. I'll send them to you in future. I dare say you'll be able to rub on by dint of patience. Rome was not built in a day, you know."

"Thank you, sir; I thank you very truly," breathed Sam. "Mr. Cockermuth sent me a small matter the other day. If I can make a bare living of it at present, that's all I ask. Fame and fortune are not rained down upon black sheep."

Which was so true a remark as to need no contradiction.

May was nearing its close then, and the summer evenings were long and lovely. As Sam went forth from the interview, he thought he would take a walk by the river, instead of turning in to his solitary rooms. Since entering upon them he had been as steady as Old Time: the accusation and its attendant shame seemed to have converted him from a heedless, youthful man into a wise old sage of age and care. Passing down Broad Street towards the bridge, he turned to the left and sauntered along beside the Severn. The water glittered in the light of the setting sun; barges, some of them bearing men and women and children, passed smoothly up and down on it; the opposite fields, towards St. John's, were green as an emerald: all things seemed to wear an aspect of brightness.

All on a sudden things grew brighter—and Sam's pulses gave a leap. He had passed the grand old red-stoned wall that enclosed the Bishop's palace, and was close upon the gates leading up to the Green, when a young lady turned out of them and came towards him with a light, quick step. It was Maria Parslet, in a pretty summer muslin, a straw hat shading her blushing face. For it did blush furiously at sight of Sam.

"Mr. Dene!"

"Maria!"

She began to say, hurriedly, that her mother had sent her with a message to the dressmaker on the Parade, and she had taken that way, as being the shortest —as if in apology for having met Sam.

He turned with her, and they paced slowly along side by side, the colour on Maria's cheeks coming and going with every word he spoke and every look he gave her—which seemed altogether senseless and unreasonable. Sam told her of his conversation with Austin Chance's father, and his promise to put a few things in his way.

"Once let me be making two hundred a year, Maria, and then——"

"Then what?" questioned Maria innocently.

"Then I should ask you to come to me, and we'd risk it together."

"Risk what?" stammered Maria, turning her head right round to watch a barge that was being towed by.

"Risk our luck. Two hundred a year is not so bad to begin upon. I should take the floor above as well as the ground-floor I rent now, and we should get along. Any way, I hope to try it."

"Oh, Mr. Dene!"

"Now don't 'Mr. Dene' me, young lady, if you please. Why, Maria, what else

can we do? A mean, malicious set of dogs and cats have turned their backs upon us both; the least we should do is to see if we can't do without them. I know you'd rather come to me than stay in Edgar Street."

Maria held her tongue, as to whether she would or not. "Mamma is negotiating to get me a situation at Cheltenham," she said.

"You will not go to Cheltenham, or anywhere else, if I get any luck," he replied dictatorially. "Life would look very blue to me now without you, Maria. And many a man and wife, rolling in riches at the end, have rubbed on with less than two hundred a year at the beginning. I wouldn't say, mind, but we might risk it on a hundred and fifty. My rent is low, you see."

"Ye–es," stammered Maria. "But–I wish that mystery of the guineas could be cleared up!"

Sam stood still, turned, and faced her. "Why do you say *that?* You are not suspecting that I took them?"

"Oh, dear, no," returned Maria, losing her breath. "I *know* you did not take them: could not. I was only thinking of your practice: so much more would come in."

"Cockermuth has sent me a small matter or two. I think I shall get on," repeated Sam.

They were at their journey's end by that time, at the dressmaker's door. "Good-evening," said Maria, timidly holding out her hand.

Sam Dene took it and clasped it. "Good-bye, my darling. I am going home to my bread and cheese supper, and I wish you were there to eat it with me!"

Maria sighed. She wondered whether that wonderful state of things would ever come to pass. Perhaps no; perhaps yes. Meanwhile no living soul knew aught of these treasonable aspirations; they were a secret between her and Sam. Mr. and Mrs. Parslet suspected nothing.

Time went on. Lawyer Chance was as good as his word, and put a few small matters of business into the hands of Sam Dene. Mr. Cockermuth did the same. The town came down upon him for it; though it let Chance alone, who was not the sort of man to be dictated to. "Well," said Cockermuth in answer, "I don't believe the lad is guilty; never have believed it. Had he been of a dishonest turn, he could have helped himself before, for a good deal of my cash passed at times through his hands, and, given that he was innocent, he had been hardly dealt by."

Sam Dene was grateful for these stray windfalls, and returned his best thanks to the lawyers for them. But they did not amount to much in the aggregate; and a gloomy vision began to present itself to his apprehension of being forced to give up the struggle, and wandering out in the world to seek a better fortune. The summer assizes drew near. Sam had no grand cause to come on at them, or small one either; but it was impossible not to give a thought now and again to what his fate might have been, had he stood committed to take his trial at them. The popular voice said that was only what he merited.

6

The assizes were held, and passed. One hot day, when July was nearing its meridian, word was brought to Miss Cockermuth—who was charitable—that a poor sick woman whom she befriended, was worse than usual, so she put on her bonnet and cloak to pay her a visit. The bonnet was a huge Leghorn, which shaded her face well from the sun, its trimming of straw colour; and the cloak was of thin black "taffeta," edged with narrow lace. It was a long walk on a hot afternoon, for the sick woman lived but just on this side Henwick. Miss Betty had got as far as the bridge, and was about to cross it when Sam Dene, coming over it at a strapping pace, ran against her.

"Miss Betty!" he cried. "I beg your pardon."

Miss Betty brought her bonnet from under the shade of her large grass-green parasol. "Dear me, is it you, Sam Dene?" she said. "Were you walking for a wager?"

Sam laughed a little. "I was hastening back to my office, Miss Betty. I have no clerk, you know, and a client *might* come in."

Miss Betty gave her head a twist, something between a nod and a shake; she noticed the doubtful tone in the "might." "Very hot, isn't it?" said she. "I'm going up to see that poor Hester Knowles; she's uncommon bad, I hear."

"You'll have a warm walk."

"Aye. Are you pretty well, Sam? You look thin."

"Do I? Oh, that's nothing but the heat of the weather. I am quite well, thank you. Good-afternoon, Miss Betty."

She shook his hand heartily. One of Sam's worst enemies, who might have run in a curricle with Charles Cockermuth, as to an out-and-out belief in his guilt, was passing at the moment, and saw it.

Miss Betty crossed the bridge, turned off into Turkey, for it was through those classical regions that her nearest and coolest way lay, and so onwards to the sick woman's room. There she found the blazing July sun streaming in at the wide window, which had no blind, no shelter whatever from it. Miss Betty had had enough of the sun out-of-doors, without having it in. Done up with the walk and the heat, she sat down on the first chair, and felt ready to swoon right off.

"Dear me, Hester, this is bad for you!" she gasped.

"Did you mean the sun, ma'am?" asked the sick woman, who was sitting full in it, wrapped in a blanket or two. "It is a little hot just now, but I don't grumble at it; I'm so cold mostly. As soon as the sun goes off the window, I shall begin to shiver."

"Well-a-day!" responded Miss Betty, wishing she could be cool enough to shiver. "But if you feel it cold now, Hester, what will you do when the autumn winds come on?"

"Ah, ma'am, please do not talk of it! I just can't tell what I shall do. That window don't fit tight, and the way the wind pours in through it upon me as I

sit here at evening, or lie in my little bed there, passes belief. I'm coughing always then."

"You should have some good thick curtains put up," said Miss Betty, gazing at the bare window, which had a pot of musk on its sill. "Woollen ones."

The sick woman smiled sadly. She was very poor now, though it had not always been so; she might as well have hoped to buy the sun itself as woollen curtains—or cotton curtains, either. Miss Betty knew that.

"I'll think about it, Hester, and see if I've any old ones that I could let you have. I'm not sure; but I'll look," repeated she—and began to empty her capacious dimity pockets of a few items of good things she had brought.

By and by, when she was a little cooler, and had talked with Hester, Miss Betty set off home again, her mind running upon the half-promised curtains. "They are properly shabby," thought she, as she went along, "but they'll serve to keep the sun and the wind off her."

She was thinking of those warm green curtains that she had picked the braid from that past disastrous morning—as the reader heard of, and all the town as well. Nothing had been done with them since.

Getting home, Miss Betty turned into the parlour. Susan—who had not yet found leisure to fix any time for her wedding—found her mistress fanning her hot face, her bonnet untied and tilted back.

"I've been to see that poor Hester Knowles, Susan," began Miss Betty.

"Law, ma'am!" interposed Susan. "What a walk for you this scorching afternoon! All up that wide New Road!"

"You may well say that, girl: but I went Turkey way. She's very ill, poor thing; and that's a frightfully staring window of hers, the sun on it like a blazing fire, and not as much as a rag for a blind; and the window don't fit, she says, and in cold weather the biting wind comes in and shivers her up. I think I might give her those shabby old curtains, Susan—that were up in Mr. Philip's room, you know, before we got the new chintz ones in."

"So you might, ma'am," said Susan, who was not a bad-hearted girl, excepting to the baker's man. "They can't go up at any of our windows as they be; and if you had 'em dyed, I don't know as they'd answer much, being so shabby."

"I put them—let me see—into the spare ottoman, didn't I? Yes, that was it. And there I suppose they must be lying still."

"Sure enough, Miss Betty," said Susan. "I've not touched 'em."

"Nor I," said Miss Betty. "With all the trouble that got into our house at that time, I couldn't give my mind to seeing after the old things, and I've not thought about them since. Come upstairs with me now, Susan; we'll see what sort of a state they are in."

They went up; and Miss Betty took off her bonnet and cloak and put her cap on. The spare ottoman, soft, and red, and ancient, used as a receptacle for odds and ends that were not wanted, stood in a spacious linen-closet on the first-floor landing. It was built out over the back-door, and had a skylight above. Susan threw back the lid of the ottoman, and Miss Betty stood by. The faded old brown

curtains, green once, lay in a heap at one end, just as Miss Betty had hastily flung them in that past day in March, when on her way to look at the chintzes.

"They're in a fine rabble, seemingly," observed Susan, pausing to regard the curtains.

"Dear me!" cried Miss Betty, conscience-stricken, for she was a careful housewife, "I let them drop in any way, I remember. I did mean to have them well shaken out of doors and properly folded, but that bother drove it all out of my head. Take them out, girl."

Susan put her strong arms underneath the heap and lifted it out with a fling. Something heavy flew out of the curtains, and dropped on the boarded floor with a crash. Letting fall the curtains, Susan gave a wild shriek of terror and Miss Betty gave a wilder, for the floor was suddenly covered with shining gold coins. Mr. Cockermuth, passing across the passage below at the moment, heard the cries, wondered whether the house was on fire, and came hastening up.

"Oh," said he coolly, taking in the aspect of affairs. "So the thief was you, Betty, after all!"

He picked up the ebony box, and bent his head to look at the guineas. Miss Betty sank down on a three-legged stool—brought in for Philip's children—and grew as white as death.

Yes, it was the missing box of guineas, come to light in the same extraordinary and unexpected manner that it had come before, without having been (as may be said) truly lost. When Miss Betty gathered her curtains off the dining-room table that March morning, a cumbersome and weighty heap, she had unwittingly gathered up the box with them. No wonder Sam Dene had not seen the box on the table after Miss Betty's departure! It was a grievous misfortune, though, that he failed to take notice it was not there.

She had no idea she was not speaking the truth in saying she *saw* the box on the table as she left the room. Having seen the box there all the morning she thought it was there still, and that she saw it, being quite unconscious that it was in her arms. Susan, too, had noticed the box on the table when she opened the door to call her mistress, and believed she was correct in saying she saw it there to the last: the real fact being that she had not observed it was gone. So there the box with its golden freight had lain undisturbed, hidden in the folds of the curtains. But for Hester Knowles's defective window, it might have stayed there still, who can say how long?

Susan, no less scared than her mistress, stood back against the closet wall for safety, out of reach of those diabolical coins; Miss Betty, groaning and half-fainting on the three-legged stool, sat pushing back her cap and her front. The lawyer picked up the guineas and counted them as he laid them flat in the box. Sixty of them: not one missing. So Sam's guinea *was* his own! He had not, as Worcester whispered, trumped up the story with Maria Parslet.

"John," gasped poor Miss Betty, beside herself with remorse and terror, "John, what will become of me now? Will anything be done?"

"How 'done'?" asked he.

"Will they bring me to trial—or anything of that—in poor Sam's place?"

"Well, I don't know," answered her brother grimly; "perhaps not this time. But I'd have you take more care in future, Betty, than to hide away gold in old curtains."

Locking the box securely within his iron safe, Mr. Cockermuth put on his hat and went down to the town hall, where the magistrates, after dispensing their wisdom, were about to disperse for the day. He told them of the wonderful recovery of the box of guineas, of how it had been lost, and that Sam Dene was wholly innocent. Their worships were of course charmed to hear it, Mr. Whitewicker observing that they had only judged Sam by appearances, and that appearances had been sufficient (in theory) to hang him.

From the town hall, Mr. Cockermuth turned off to Sam's office. Sam was making a great show of business, surrounded by a table full of imposing parchments, but with never a client to the fore. His old master grasped his hand.

"Well, Sam, my boy," he said, "the tables have turned for you. That box of guineas is found."

Sam never spoke an answering word. His lips parted with expectation: his breath seemed to be a little short.

"Betty had got it all the time. She managed somehow to pick it up off the table with those wretched old curtains she had there, all unconsciously, of course, and it has lain hidden with the curtains upstairs in a lumber-box ever since. Betty will never forgive herself. She'll have a fit of the jaundice over this."

Sam drew a long breath. "You will let the public know, sir?"

"Aye, Sam, without the loss of an hour. I've begun with the magistrates—and a fine sensation the news made amidst 'em, I can tell you; and now I'm going round to the newspapers; and I shall go over to Elm Farm the first thing tomorrow. The town took up the cause against you, Sam: take care it does not eat you now in its repentance. Look here, you'll have to come round to Betty, or she'll moan her heart out: you won't bear malice, Sam?"

"No, that I won't," said Sam warmly. "Miss Betty did not bear it to me. She has been as kind as can be all along."

The town did want to eat Sam. It is the custom of the true Briton to go to extremes. Being unable to shake Sam's hands quite off, the city would fain have chaired him round the streets with honours, as it used to chair its newly returned members.

Captain Cockermuth, sent for posthaste, came to Worcester all contrition, beseeching Sam to forgive him fifty times a day, and wanting to press the box of guineas upon him as a peace-offering. Sam would not take it: he laughingly told the captain that the box did not seem to carry luck with it.

And then Sam's troubles were over. And no objection was made by his people (as it otherwise might have been) to his marrying Maria Parslet by way of recompense. "God never fails to bring good out of evil, my dear," said old Mrs. Jacobson to Maria, the first time they had her on a visit at Elm Farm. As to Sam, he had short time for Elm Farm, or anything else in the shape of recreation. Practice was flowing in quickly: litigants arguing, one with another, that a young

man, lying for months under an imputation of theft, and then coming out of it with flying colours, must needs be a clever lawyer.

"But, Johnny," Sam said to me, when talking of the past, "there's one thing I would alter if I made the laws. No person, so long as he is only suspected of crime, should have his name proclaimed publicly. I am not speaking of murder, you understand, or charges of that grave nature; but of such a case as mine. My name appeared in full, in all the local newspapers, Samson Reginald Dene, coupled with theft, and of course it got a mark upon it. It is an awful blight upon a man when he is innocent, one that he may never quite live down. Suspicions must arise, I know that, of the innocent as well as the guilty, and they must undergo preliminary examinations in public and submit to legal inquiries: but time enough to proclaim who the man is when evidence strengthens against him, and he is committed for trial; until then let his name be suppressed. At least that is my opinion."

And it is mine as well as Sam's.

C. Hedley Barker

THE ACE OF TROUBLE

from PEARSON'S MAGAZINE, 1925

Permission to reprint is granted through John Farquharson

It must have been unbearable for Herbert Dawlish to reflect that, had the waitress not been slack, he would never have committed murder.

Dawlish had just ten minutes to spare, and he was feeling infernally hungry. So he dropped into an A.B.C. and called for a cup of tea and a bath bun. The waitress dawdled, and Herbert Dawlish fidgeted impatiently. He must have taken out his watch at least ten times in five minutes. When at last his tea and bath bun arrived, he had two minutes in which to bolt it down and catch the train for Herne Bay.

He rushed out to the platform just as the train was pulling out. His lips tightened with annoyance as he realised that he couldn't possibly reach the saloon. This meant that he would miss the "coasters," and his game of cards.

The train gathered speed. Dawlish gripped his bag, and ran, realising that he would be lucky now to catch it at all. However, he managed with a flying leap to land (amid the yells of railway officials) on the footboard of the rear coach. He clung there for a moment, panting, then opened the door and subsided with a gasp on the seat.

The man opposite regarded Herbert Dawlish with interest. He was a flashy

sort of person with a gold horseshoe in his tie, and aggressively square shoes. He said the usual things that people do say on these occasions—narrow shave, not so easy to run at Dawlish's time of life, and so forth. He also launched into a protracted and lurid reminiscence which had to do with one Sam Biggs, who, being denied the luck which had attended Mr. Dawlish, fell between the footboard and the platform.

"'Orrible sight. I never want to see another like it."

Herbert Dawlish, far as distant Jupiter in that moment from murderous intent, gazed upon the man he was going to murder. He never suffered fools gladly, and this fellow seemed a particularly priceless specimen. However, when the man suggested a game of cards, Dawlish brightened considerably. He had a passion for cards, and he fell in eagerly with the proposal.

"I have a pack here," he said, diving into his pocket. There his fingers came in contact with something hard, and he pulled it out with an embarrassed smile. He said, jocularly, laying an automatic pistol on the table:

"Don't be alarmed. I'm no gunman. I bought this in town to-day. You see, I belong to the Herne Bay rifle club, and they've just started a revolver class. Fascinating sport."

The other nodded.

"May I?" he said, and, picking up the weapon, examined it with the eye of an expert. "Dandy little gun," was his comment. "Loaded, too, by gosh!"

"Er—yes. I brought some cartridges along. It's quite safe. The catch is on. Now, what shall we play? Do you happen to know Soixante-six. It's an ideal game for two."

"Swa—?"

"In other words, sixty-six. It's a kind of—"

"Right, governor! I got you. Sixty-six. Yers. Used to play it over the other side. I remember at Vimmy Ridge—"

"Cut, will you?"

Herbert Dawlish dealt.

"What about stakes?" he murmured with a swift, appraising glance at the other's ensemble.

"Oh, five bob a time."

Dawlish was surprised. This was a good deal higher than he was used to, but he guessed he could hold his own, anyway. He dealt the cards in bundles of three and two. Play began.

Now, it very soon became obvious to Dawlish that this fellow with the horseshoe had handled cards before. He had that nifty method of shuffling and dealing which involves a flourishing and crackling of the cards. He licked his thumbs. The pasteboards flew from his nimble fingers like greased lightning.

Dawlish paid out. Five—ten—fifteen—thirty-five—fifty. He lost six pounds. A dull flush tinted his high cheekbones. He fortified himself with a long pull from his pocket-flask, clenched his teeth, and concentrated grimly.

Long before the train had reached Chatham that six pounds had become forty-six. Dawlish was plunging madly to retrieve his losses. A ghastly fear con-

tracted his heart. He had lost much—very much more than he could afford to lose. It was quarter day, and he had calls to meet which must be met out of this money that he was losing.

At seventy pounds Herbert Dawlish leant back and wiped the sweat from his forehead with a shaky hand. He was pale, and the corners of his mouth were out of his control. A very unpleasant sight, indeed.

"I am afraid," he muttered, "that I can't go on. I've lost every penny."

The nifty man stopped short in the midst of a tune he was whistling.

"That a fact? Hard luck, mate. Good game, though, eh? 'Ammer and tongs."

"Look here," said Dawlish abjectly. "I—it's a queer thing to ask, but—could you let me have that money back? For a little while, I mean. I would repay you, later. But, just now, I—I—"

The nifty man had been staring at Dawlish in blank surprise. Now he suddenly guffawed.

"Well, that's rich," he observed. "I'll tell the missus that when I gits 'ome. She'll cry 'er eyes out, that she will. No, matey. Napoo. I ain't the Salvation Army 'Ome."

"Let me explain," begged Dawlish in agony. "You don't understand. It's like this—"

"Aw, shove a boot in it, ole feller. You oughn't never to 'ave come out without yer nurse. Hey! What the—"

"Put up your hands," said Dawlish, staring wickedly from behind his automatic. "Right up!"

Even then, Dawlish had no notion of murder. He merely wanted to scare the fellow into parting with the money. He was frantic. He positively daren't go home and face his wife with a story of seventy pounds lost. But, firearms are dangerous things to play with. The nifty man's eyes narrowed. He made a sudden spring. And Dawlish, closing his eyes, pulled the trigger.

Death is shockingly quick and sudden. In one brief second Dawlish was saddled with a corpse. There was a grim blue hole in the middle of its forehead, and it had sagged slackly on the floor like a sack of something. Dawlish commanded himself with an effort, and began to think out ways and means.

He was about to bundle the body out of the carriage on to the permanent way when he caught sight of a wrist-watch. An inspiration caused him to alter the time of this watch to five-fifty. He counted on the watch stopping when the crash came, and a watch stopped at five-fifty (unless the body were found immediately) would point to the fact of the man's having travelled down by an earlier train.

This done, he opened the carriage-door, looked cautiously ahead and behind, then, with the train doing about forty, shoved out the remains of the nifty man.

Venner, the Scotland Yard man, was in the eight-forty to town on the following morning. He and two others greeted Dawlish with ribald cries, as usual. These four had played cards on the up journey every day (barring holidays) for ten years.

"Come along, you old blighter—the cards," they cried. "Where were you loafing last night, by the way?"

"Late," said Dawlish. "Had to run for it. Seen the paper? This murder on the five-ten?"

Smith, who was sorting out Dawlish's cards, nodded.

"Poor devil's all bashed about," he said. "Face practically gone, they say. Not that he'd feel that, I suppose. You heard anything about it, Venner, apart from what the papers give?"

Venner smiled quietly.

"I hear a good deal," he said, "that I'm not allowed to tell. As a matter of fact, I viewed the body about two or three hours after the murder. They rushed me up by car from Herne Bay."

"I say," said Smith, "look here, old Dawlish, you've only got half a pack here. The ace of trouble's missing."

Smith always called the ace of spades the ace of trouble, because spades stood for trouble in the fortune-teller's jargon.

"I expect it's in my pocket," said Dawlish.

But he was spared the trouble of searching by Venner. The man from the Yard looked suddenly grave as he pulled out a card from his own pocket.

"No," he said. "Here it is, unless I'm mistaken."

He laid the ace of spades on the table—the ace which had been missing from that same pack.

"Yes, that's it, by Jove!" cried Smith. "Where the devil did you get it, you old card-sharper?"

Venner turned and looked at Dawlish. Then he laid a hand on his arm.

"Dawlish," he said, "this hurts like blazes. But I've got to do it. You're arrested. *That ace of spades was found up the sleeve of the murdered man.*"

Edgar Allan Poe

THE MYSTERY OF MARIE ROGÊT[1]

from an American magazine

1842

Es giebt eine Reihe idealischer Begebenheiten, die der Wirklichkeit parallel läuft. Selten fallen sie zusammen. Menschen und Zufälle modificiren gewöhnlich die idealische Begebenheit, so dass sie unvollkommen erscheint, und ihre Folgen gleichfalls unvollkommen sind. So bei der Reformation; statt des Protestantismus kam das Lutherthum hervor.

There are ideal series of events which run parallel with the real ones. They rarely coincide. Men and circumstances generally modify the ideal train of events, so that it seems imperfect, and its consequences are equally imperfect. Thus with the Reformation; instead of Protestantism came Lutheranism.—Novalis. *Moral Ansichten.*

There are few persons, even among the calmest thinkers, who have not occasionally been startled into a vague yet thrilling half-credence in the supernatural, by *coincidences* of so seemingly marvellous a character that, as *mere* coincidences, the intellect has been unable to receive them. Such sentiments—for the half-credences of which I speak have never the full force of *thought*—such sentiments are seldom thoroughly stifled unless by reference to the doctrine of chance, or, as it is technically termed, the Calculus of Probabilities. Now this Calculus is, in its essence, purely mathematical; and thus we have the anomaly of

[1] Upon the original publication of *Marie Rogêt*, the foot-notes now appended were considered unnecessary; but the lapse of several years since the tragedy upon which the tale is based, renders it expedient to give them, and also to say a few words in explanation of the general design. A young girl, Mary Cecilia Rogers, was murdered in the vicinity of New York; and although her death occasioned an intense and long-enduring excitement, the mystery attending it had remained unsolved at the period when the present paper was written and published (November 1842). Herein, under pretence of relating the fate of a Parisian *grisette*, the author has followed, in minute detail, the essential, while merely paralleling the inessential, facts of the real murder of Mary Rogers. Thus all argument upon the fiction is applicable to the truth; and the investigation of the truth was the object.

The Mystery of Marie Rogêt was composed at a distance from the scene of the atrocity, and with no other means of investigation than the newspapers afforded. Thus much escaped the writer of which he could have availed himself had he been upon the spot and visited the localities. It may not be improper to record, nevertheless, that the confessions of *two* persons (one of them the Madame Deluc of the narrative), made, at different periods, long subsequent to the publication, confirmed, in full, not only the general conclusion, but absolutely *all* the chief hypothetical details by which that conclusion was attained.

the most rigidly exact in science applied to the shadow and spirituality of the most intangible in speculation.

The extraordinary details which I am now called upon to make public, will be found to form, as regards sequence of time, the primary branch of a series of scarcely intelligible *coincidences*, whose secondary or concluding branch will be recognised by all readers in the late murder of Mary Cecilia Rogers, at New York.

When, in an article entitled, *The Murders in the Rue Morgue*, I endeavoured, about a year ago, to depict some very remarkable features in the mental character of my friend, the Chevalier C. Auguste Dupin, it did not occur to me that I should ever resume the subject. This depicting of character constituted my design; and this design was thoroughly fulfilled in the wild train of circumstances brought to instance Dupin's idiosyncrasy. I might have adduced other examples, but I should have proven no more. Late events, however, in their surprising development, have startled me into some further details, which will carry with them the air of extorted confession. Hearing what I have lately heard, it would be indeed strange should I remain silent in regard to what I both heard and saw long ago.

Upon the winding up of the tragedy involved in the deaths of Madame L'Espanaye and her daughter, the Chevalier dismissed the affair at once from his attention, and relapsed into his old habits of moody reverie. Prone, at all times, to abstraction, I readily fell in with his humour; and continuing to occupy our chambers in the Faubourg Saint Germain, we gave the Future to the winds, and slumbered tranquilly in the Present, weaving the dull world around us into dreams.

But these dreams were not altogether uninterrupted. It may readily be supposed that the part played by my friend, in the drama at the Rue Morgue, had not failed of its impression upon the fancies of the Parisian police. With its emissaries, the name of Dupin had grown into a household word. The simple character of those inductions by which he had disentangled the mystery never having been explained even to the Prefect, or to any other individual than myself, of course it is not surprising that the affair was regarded as little less than miraculous, or that the Chevalier's analytical abilities acquired for him the credit of intuition. His frankness would have led him to disabuse every inquirer of such prejudice; but his indolent humour forbade all further agitation of a topic whose interest to himself had long ceased. It thus happened that he found himself the cynosure of the political eyes; and the cases were not few in which attempt was made to engage his services at the Prefecture. One of the most remarkable instances was that of the murder of a young girl named Marie Rogêt.

This event occurred about two years after the atrocity in the Rue Morgue. Marie, whose Christian and family name will at once arrest attention from their resemblance to those of the unfortunate "cigar-girl," was the only daughter of the widow Estelle Rogêt. The father had died during the child's infancy, and from the period of his death, until within eighteen months before the assassination which forms the subject of our narrative, the mother and daughter had

dwelt together in the Rue Pavée Saint Andrée;[2] Madame there keeping a *pension*, assisted by Marie. Affairs went on thus until the latter had attained her twenty-second year, when her great beauty attracted the notice of a perfumer, who occupied one of the shops in the basement of the Palais Royal, and whose custom lay chiefly among the desperate adventurers infesting that neighbourhood. Monsieur Le Blanc[3] was not unaware of the advantages to be derived from the attendance of the fair Marie in his perfumery; and his liberal proposals were accepted eagerly by the girl, although with somewhat more of hesitation by Madame.

The anticipations of the shopkeeper were realised, and his rooms soon became notorious through the charms of the sprightly *grisette*. She had been in his employ about a year, when her admirers were thrown into confusion by her sudden disappearance from the shop. Monsieur Le Blanc was unable to account for her absence, and Madame Rogêt was distracted with anxiety and terror. The public papers immediately took up the theme, and the police were upon the point of making serious investigations, when, one morning, after the lapse of a week, Marie, in good health, but with a somewhat saddened air, made her reappearance at her usual counter in the perfumery. All inquiry, except that of a private character, was, of course, immediately hushed. Monsieur Le Blanc professed total ignorance, as before. Marie, with Madame, replied to all questions, that the last week had been spent at the house of a relation in the country. Thus the affair died away, and was generally forgotten; for the girl, ostensibly to relieve herself from the impertinence of curiosity, soon bade a final adieu to the perfumer, and sought the shelter of her mother's residence in the Rue Pavée Saint Andrée.

It was about five months after this return home, that her friends were alarmed by her sudden disappearance for the second time. Three days elapsed, and nothing was heard of her. On the fourth her corpse was found floating in the Seine,[4] near the shore which is opposite the Quartier of the Rue Saint Andrée, and at a point not very far distant from the secluded neighbourhood of the Barrière du Roule.[5]

The atrocity of this murder (for it was at once evident that murder had been committed), the youth and beauty of the victim, and, above all, her previous notoriety, conspired to produce intense excitement in the minds of the sensitive Parisians. I can call to mind no similar occurrence producing so general and so intense an effect. For several weeks, in the discussion of this one absorbing theme, even the momentous political topics of the day were forgotten. The Prefect made unusual exertions; and the powers of the whole Parisian police were, of course, taxed to the utmost extent.

Upon the first discovery of the corpse, it was not supposed that the murderer would be able to elude, for more than a very brief period, the inquisition which was immediately set on foot. It was not until the expiration of a week that it

[2] Nassau Street.
[3] Anderson.
[4] The Hudson.
[5] Weehawken.

was deemed necessary to offer a reward; and even then this reward was limited to a thousand francs. In the meantime the investigation proceeded with vigour, if not always with judgment, and numerous individuals were examined to no purpose; while, owing to the continual absence of all clue to the mystery, the popular excitement greatly increased. At the end of the tenth day it was thought advisable to double the sum originally proposed; and, at length, the second week having elapsed without leading to any discoveries, and the prejudice which always exists in Paris against the police having given vent to itself in several serious *emeutes*, the Prefect took it upon himself to offer the sum of twenty thousand francs "for the conviction of the assassin," or, if more than one should prove to have been implicated, "for the conviction of any one of the assassins." In the proclamation setting forth this reward, a full pardon was promised to any accomplice who should come forward in evidence against his fellow; and to the whole was appended, wherever it appeared, the private placard of a committee of citizens, offering ten thousand francs, in addition to the amount proposed by the Prefecture. The entire reward thus stood at no less than thirty thousand francs, which will be regarded as an extraordinary sum when we consider the humble condition of the girl, and the great frequency, in large cities, of such atrocities as the one described.

No one doubted now that the mystery of this murder would be immediately brought to light. But although, in one or two instances, arrests were made which promised elucidation, yet nothing was elicited which could implicate the parties suspected; and they were discharged forthwith. Strange as it may appear, the third week from the discovery of the body had passed, and passed without any light being thrown upon the subject, before even a rumour of the events which had so agitated the public mind reached the ears of Dupin and myself. Engaged in researches which had absorbed our whole attention, it had been nearly a month since either of us had gone abroad, or received a visitor, or more than glanced at the leading political articles in one of the daily papers. The first intelligence of the murder was brought us by G——, in person. He called upon us early in the afternoon of the thirteenth of July 18–, and remained with us until late in the night. He had been piqued by the failure of all his endeavours to ferret out the assassins. His reputation—so he said with a peculiarly Parisian air—was at stake. Even his honour was concerned. The eyes of the public were upon him; and there was really no sacrifice which he would not be willing to make for the development of the mystery. He concluded a somewhat droll speech with a compliment upon what he was pleased to term the *tact* of Dupin, and made him a direct and certainly a liberal proposition, the precise nature of which I do not feel myself at liberty to disclose, but which has no bearing upon the proper subject of my narrative.

The compliment my friend rebutted as best he could, but the proposition he accepted at once, although its advantages were altogether provisional. This point being settled, the Prefect broke forth at once into explanations of his own views, interspersing them with long comments upon the evidence; of which latter we were not yet in possession. He discoursed much and, beyond doubt, learnedly;

while I hazarded an occasional suggestion as the night wore drowsily away. Dupin, sitting steadily in his accustomed armchair, was the embodiment of respectful attention. He wore spectacles, during the whole interview; and an occasional glance beneath their green glasses sufficed to convince me that he slept not the less soundly, because silently, throughout the seven or eight leaden-footed hours which immediately preceded the departure of the Prefect.

In the morning, I procured, at the Prefecture, a full report of all the evidence elicited, and, at the various newspaper offices, a copy of every paper in which, from first to last, had been published any decisive information in regard to this sad affair. Freed from all that was positively disproved, the mass of information stood thus:

Marie Rogêt left the residence of her mother, in the Rue Pavée St. Andrée, about nine o'clock in the morning of Sunday, June the 22nd, 18—. In going out, she gave notice to a Monsieur Jacques St. Eustache,[6] and to him only, of her intention to spend the day with an aunt, who resided in the Rue des Drômes. The Rue des Drômes is a short and narrow but populous thoroughfare, not far from the banks of the river, and at a distance of some two miles, in the most direct course possible, from the *pension* of Madame Rogêt. St. Eustache was the accepted suitor of Marie, and lodged, as well as took his meals, at the *pension*. He was to have gone for his betrothed at dusk, and to have escorted her home. In the afternoon, however, it came on to rain heavily; and, supposing that she would remain at her aunt's (as she had done under similar circumstances before), he did not think it necessary to keep his promise. As night drew on, Madame Rogêt (who was an infirm old lady, seventy years of age) was heard to express a fear "that she should never see Marie again"; but this observation attracted little attention at the time.

On Monday it was ascertained that the girl had not been to the Rue des Drômes; and when the day elapsed without tidings of her, a tardy search was instituted at several points in the city and its environs. It was not, however, until the fourth day from the period of her disappearance that anything satisfactory was ascertained respecting her. On this day (Wednesday, the 25th of June) a Monsieur Beauvais,[7] who, with a friend, had been making inquiries for Marie near the Barrière du Roule, on the shore of the Seine which is opposite the Rue Pavée St. Andrée, was informed that a corpse had just been towed ashore by some fishermen, who had found it floating in the river. Upon seeing the body, Beauvais, after some hesitation, identified it as that of the perfumery-girl. His friend recognised it more promptly.

The face was suffused with dark blood, some of which issued from the mouth. No foam was seen, as in the case of the merely drowned. There was no discoloration in the cellular tissue. About the throat were bruises and impressions of fingers. The arms were bent over on the chest, and were rigid. The right hand was clenched; the left partially open. On the left wrist were two circular excoria-

[6] Payn.
[7] Crommelin.

tions, apparently the effect of ropes, or of a rope in more than one volution. A part of the right wrist, also, was much chafed, as well as the back throughout its extent, but more especially at the shoulder-blades. In bringing the body to the shore the fishermen had attached to it a rope, but none of the excoriations had been effected by this. The flesh of the neck was much swollen. There were no cuts apparent, or bruises which appeared the effect of blows. A piece of lace was found tied so tightly around the neck as to be hidden from sight; it was completely buried in the flesh, and was fastened by a knot which lay just under the left ear. This alone would have sufficed to produce death. The medical testimony spoke confidently of the virtuous character of the deceased. She had been subjected, it was said, to brutal violence. The corpse was in such condition when found that there could have been no difficulty in its recognition by friends.

The dress was much torn and otherwise disordered. In the outer garment, a slip, about a foot wide, had been torn upward from the bottom hem to the waist, but not torn off, was wound three times about the waist, and secured by a sort of hitch in the back. The dress immediately beneath the frock was of fine muslin; and from this a slip eighteen inches wide had been torn entirely out—torn very evenly and with great care. It was found around her neck, fitting loosely, and secured with a hard knot. Over this muslin slip and the slip of lace the strings of a bonnet were attached, the bonnet being appended. The knot by which the strings of the bonnet were fastened was not a lady's, but a slip or sailor's knot.

After the recognition of the corpse, it was not, as usual, taken to the Morgue (this formality being superfluous), but hastily interred not far from the spot at which it was brought ashore. Through the exertions of Beauvais, the matter was industriously hushed up, as far as possible; and several days had elapsed before any public emotion resulted. A weekly paper,[8] however, at length took up the theme; the corpse was disinterred, and a re-examination instituted; but nothing was elicited beyond what has been already noted. The clothes, however, were now submitted to the mother and friends of the deceased and fully identified as those worn by the girl upon leaving home.

Meantime, the excitement increased hourly. Several individuals were arrested and discharged. St. Eustache fell especially under suspicion; and he failed, at first, to give an intelligible account of his whereabouts during the Sunday on which Marie left home. Subsequently, however, he submitted to Monsieur G—, affidavits, accounting satisfactorily for every hour of the day in question. As time passed and no discovery ensued, a thousand contradictory rumours were circulated, and journalists busied themselves in *suggestions*. Among these, the one which attracted the most notice, was the idea that Marie Rogêt still lived—that the corpse found in the Seine was that of some other unfortunate. It will be proper that I submit to the reader some passages which embody the suggestion alluded to. These passages are *literal* translations from *L'Etoile*,[9] a paper conducted, in general, with much ability.

[8] The New York *Mercury*.

[9] The New York *Brother Jonathan*, edited by H. Hastings Weld, Esq.

"Mademoiselle Rogêt left her mother's house on Sunday morning, June the 22nd, 18—, with the ostensible purpose of going to see her aunt, or some other connections in the Rue des Drômes. From that hour, nobody is proved to have seen her. There is no trace or tidings of her at all. . . . There has no person, whatever come forward, so far, who saw her at all, on that day, after she left her mother's door. . . . Now, though we have no evidence that Marie Rogêt was in the land of the living after nine o'clock on Sunday, June the 22nd, we have proof that, up to that hour, she was alive. On Wednesday noon, at twelve, a female body was discovered afloat on the shore of the Barrière du Roule. This was, even if we presume that Marie Rogêt was thrown into the river within three hours after she left her mother's house, only three days from the time she left her home—three days to an hour. But it is folly to suppose that the murder, if murder was committed on her body, could have been consummated soon enough to have enabled her murderers to throw the body into the river before midnight. Those who are guilty of such horrid crimes choose darkness rather than light. . . . Thus we see that if the body found in the river *was* that of Marie Rogêt, it could only have been in the water two and a half days, or three at the outside. All experience has shown that drowned bodies, or bodies thrown into the water immediately after death by violence, require from six to ten days for sufficient decomposition to take place to bring them to the top of the water. Even where a cannon is fired over a corpse, and it rises before, at least, five or six days' immersion, it sinks again, if let alone. Now, we ask what was there in this case to cause a departure from the ordinary course of nature? . . . If the body had been kept in its mangled state on shore until Tuesday night, some trace would be found on shore of the murderers. It is a doubtful point, also, whether the body would be so soon afloat, even were it thrown in after having been dead two days. And, furthermore, it is exceedingly improbable that any villains who had committed such a murder as is here supposed, would have thrown the body in without weight to sink it, when such a precaution could have so easily been taken."

The editor here proceeds to argue that the body must have been in water "not three days merely, but, at least, five times three days," because it was so far decomposed that Beauvais had great difficulty in recognising it. This latter point, however, was fully disproved. I continue the translation:

"What, then, are the facts on which M. Beauvais says that he has no doubt the body was that of Marie Rogêt? He ripped up the gown sleeve, and says he found marks which satisfied him of the identity. The public generally supposed those marks to have consisted of some description of scars. He rubbed the arm and found *hair* upon it—something as indefinite, we think, as can readily be imagined—as little conclusive as finding an arm in the sleeve. M. Beauvais did not return that night, but sent word to Madame Rogêt, at seven o'clock, on Wednesday evening, that an investigation was still in progress respecting her daughter. If we allow that Madame Rogêt, from her age and grief, could not go over (which is allowing a great deal), there certainly must have been some one who

would have thought it worth while to go over and attend the investigation, if they thought the body was that of Marie. Nobody went over. There was nothing said or heard about the matter in the Rue Pavée St. Andrée, that reached even the occupants of the same building. M. St. Eustache, the lover and intended husband of Marie, who boarded in her mother's house, deposes that he did not hear of the discovery of the body of his intended until the next morning, when M. Beauvais came into his chamber and told him of it. For an item of news like this, it strikes us it was very coolly received."

In this way the journal endeavoured to create the impression of an apathy on the part of the relatives of Marie, inconsistent with the supposition that these relatives believed the corpse to be hers. Its insinuations amount to this: that Marie, with the connivance of her friends, had absented herself from the city for reasons involving a charge against her chastity; and that these friends upon the discovery of a corpse in the Seine, somewhat resembling that of the girl, had availed themselves of the opportunity to impress the public with the belief of her death. But *L'Etoile* was again overhasty. It was distinctly proved that no apathy, such as was imagined, existed; that the old lady was exceedingly feeble, and so agitated as to be unable to attend to any duty; that St. Eustache, so far from receiving the news coolly, was distracted with grief, and bore himself so frantically, that M. Beauvais prevailed upon a friend and relative to take charge of him, and prevent his attending the examination at the disinterment. Moreover, although it was stated by *L'Etoile*, that the corpse was re-interred at the public expense, that an advantageous offer of private sepulture was absolutely declined by the family, and that no member of the family attended the ceremonial; although, I say, all this was asserted by *L'Etoile* in furtherance of the impression it designed to convey—yet *all* this was satisfactorily disproved. In a subsequent number of the paper, an attempt was made to throw suspicion upon Beauvais himself. The editor says:

"Now, then, a change comes over the matter. We are told that, on one occasion, while a Madame B—— was at Madame Rogêt's house, M. Beauvais, who was going out, told her that a *gendarme* was expected there, and that she, Madame B——, must not say anything to the *gendarme* until he returned, but let the matter be for him. . . . In the present posture of affairs M. Beauvais appears to have the whole matter locked up in his head. A single step cannot be taken without M. Beauvais, for go which way you will, you run against him. . . . For some reason he determined that nobody shall have anything to do with the proceedings but himself, and he has elbowed the male relatives out of the way, according to their representations, in a very singular manner. He seems to have been very much averse to permitting the relatives to see the body."

By the following fact, some colour was given to the suspicion thus thrown upon Beauvais. A visitor at his office, a few days prior to the girl's disappearance, and during the absence of its occupant, had observed a *rose* in the key-hole of the door, and the name "Marie" inscribed upon a slate which hung near at hand.

The general impression, so far as we were enabled to glean it from the news-

papers, seemed to be, that Marie had been the victim of a *gang* of desperadoes —that by these she had been borne across the river, maltreated, and murdered. *Le Commerciel*,[10] however, a print of extensive influence, was earnest in combating this popular idea. I quote a passage or two from its columns:

"We are persuaded that pursuit has hitherto been on a false scent so far as it has been directed to the Barrière du Roule. It is impossible that a person so well known to thousands as this young woman was, should have passed three blocks without someone having seen her; and any one who saw her would have remembered it, for she interested all who knew her. It was when the streets were full of people, when she went out. . . . It is impossible that she could have gone to the Barrière du Roule, or to the Rue des Drômes, without being recognised by a dozen persons; yet no one has come forward who saw her outside her mother's door, and there is no evidence except the testimony concerning her *expressed intentions*, that she did go out at all. Her gown was torn, bound round her, and tied; and by that the body was carried as a bundle. If the murder had been committed at the Barrière du Roule, there would have been no necessity for any such arrangement. The fact that the body was found floating near the Barrière is no proof as to where it was thrown into the water. . . . A piece of one of the unfortunate girl's petticoats, two feet long and one foot wide, was torn out and tied under her chin around the back of her head, probably to prevent screams. This was done by fellows who had no pocket-handkerchief."

A day or two before the Prefect called upon us, however, some important information reached the police, which seemed to overthrow, at least, the chief portion of *Le Commerciel's* argument. Two small boys, sons of a Madame Deluc, while roaming among the woods near the Barrière du Roule, chanced to penetrate a close thicket, within which were three or four large stones, forming a kind of seat with a back and footstool. On the upper stone lay a white petticoat; on the second, a silk scarf. A parasol, gloves, and a pocket-handkerchief were also here found. The handkerchief bore the name "Marie Rogêt." Fragments of dress were discovered on the brambles around. The earth was trampled, the bushes were broken, and there was every evidence of a struggle. Between the thicket and the river, the fences were found taken down, and the ground bore evidence of some heavy burthen having been dragged along it.

A weekly paper, *Le Soleil*,[11] had the following comments upon this discovery —comments which merely echoed the sentiment of the whole Parisian press:

"The things had all evidently been there at least three or four weeks; they were all mildewed down hard with the action of the rain, and stuck together from mildew. The grass had grown around and over some of them. The silk on the parasol was strong, but the threads of it were run together within. The upper part, where it had been doubled and folded, was all mildewed and rotten, and tore on its being opened. . . . The pieces of her frock torn out by the bushes were about three inches wide and six inches long. One part was the hem

[10] New York *Journal of Commerce*.

[11] Philadelphia *Saturday Evening Post*, edited by C. I. Peterson, Esq.

of the frock, and it had been mended; the other piece was part of the skirt, not the hem. They looked like strips torn off, and were on the thorn bush, about a foot from the ground. . . . There can be no doubt, therefore, that the spot of this appalling outrage has been discovered."

Consequent upon this discovery, new evidence appeared. Madame Deluc testified that she keeps a roadside inn not far from the bank of the river, opposite the Barrière du Roule. The neighbourhood is secluded—particularly so. It is the usual Sunday resort of blackguards from the city, who cross the river in boats. About three o'clock, in the afternoon of the Sunday in question, a young girl arrived at the inn accompanied by a young man of dark complexion. The two remained here for some time. On their departure, they took the road to some thick woods in the vicinity. Madame Deluc's attention was called to the dress worn by the girl, on account of its resemblance to one worn by a deceased relative. A scarf was particularly noticed. Soon after the departure of the couple, a gang of miscreants made their appearance, behaved boisterously, ate and drank without making payment, followed in the route of the young man and girl, returned to the inn about dusk, and re-crossed the river as if in great haste.

It was soon after dark, upon this same evening, that Madame Deluc, as well as her eldest son, heard the screams of a female in the vicinity of the inn. The screams were violent but brief. Madame D. recognised not only the scarf which was found in the thicket, but the dress which was discovered upon the corpse. An omnibus driver, Valence,[12] now also testified that he saw Marie Rogêt cross a ferry on the Seine, on the Sunday in question, in company with a young man of dark complexion. He, Valence, knew Marie, and could not be mistaken in her identity. The articles found in the thicket were fully identified by the relatives of Marie.

The items of evidence and information thus collected by myself, from the newspapers, at the suggestion of Dupin, embraced only one more point—but this was a point of seemingly vast consequence. It appears that, immediately after the discovery of the clothes as above described, the lifeless or nearly lifeless body of St. Eustache, Marie's betrothed, was found in the vicinity of what all now supposed the scene of the outrage. A phial labelled "laudanum," and emptied, was found near him. His breath gave evidence of the poison. He died without speaking. Upon his person was found a letter, briefly stating his love for Marie, with his design of self-destruction.

"I need scarcely tell you," said Dupin, as he finished the perusal of my notes, "that this is a far more intricate case than that of the Rue Morgue; from which it differs in one important respect. This is an *ordinary*, although an atrocious, instance of crime. There is nothing peculiarly *outré* about it. You will observe that, for this reason, the mystery has been considered easy when for this reason it should have been considered difficult of solution. Thus, at first, it was thought unnecessary to offer a reward. The myrmidons of G— were able at once to comprehend how and why such an atrocity *might have been* committed. They

[12] Adam.

could picture to their imaginations a mode—many modes—and a motive—many motives; and because it was not impossible that either of these numerous modes and motives *could* have been the actual one, they have taken it for granted that one of them *must*. But the ease with which these variable fancies were entertained, and the very plausibility which each assumed, should have been understood as indicative rather of the difficulties than of the facilities which must attend elucidation. I have therefore observed that it is by prominences above the plane of the ordinary, that reason feels her way, if at all, in her search of the true, and that the proper question in cases such as this is not so much 'what has occurred?' as 'what has occurred that has never occurred before?' In the investigations at the house of Madame L'Espanaye,[13] the agents of G— were discouraged and confounded by that very *unusualness* which, to a properly regulated intellect, would have afforded the surest omen of success; while this same intellect might have been plunged in despair at the ordinary character of all that met the eye in the case of the perfumery-girl, and yet told of nothing but easy triumph to the functionaries of the Prefecture.

"In the case of Madame L'Espanaye and her daughter, there was, even at the beginning of our investigation, no doubt that murder had been committed. The idea of suicide was excluded at once. Here, too, we are freed, at the commencement, from all supposition of self-murder. The body found at the Barrière du Roule was found under such circumstances as to leave us no room for embarrassment upon this important point. But it has been suggested that the corpse discovered is not that of the Marie Rogêt for the conviction of whose assassin, or assassins, the reward is offered, and respecting whom, solely, our agreement has been arranged with the Prefect. We both know this gentleman well. It will not do to trust him too far. If, dating our inquiries from the body found, and then tracing a murderer, we yet discover this body to be that of some other individual than Marie; or if, starting from the living Marie, we find her, yet find her unassassinated—in either case we lose our labour; since it is Monsieur G— with whom we have to deal. For our own purpose, therefore, if not for the purpose of justice, it is indispensable that our first step should be the determination of the identity of the corpse with the Marie Rogêt who is missing.

"With the public the arguments of *L'Etoile* have had weight; and that the journal itself is convinced of their importance would appear from the manner in which it commences one of its essays upon the subject—'Several of the morning papers of the day,' it says, 'speak of the *conclusive* article in Monday's *Etoile*.' To me, this article appears conclusive of little beyond the zeal of its inditer. We should bear in mind that, in general, it is the object of our newspapers rather to create a sensation—to make a point—than to further the cause of truth. The latter end is only pursued when it seems coincident with the former. The print which merely falls in with ordinary opinion (however well founded this opinion may be) earns for itself no credit with the mobs. The mass of the people regard as profound only him who suggests *pungent contradictions*

[13] See *Murders in the Rue Morgue*.

of the general idea. In ratiocination, not less than in literature, it is the *epigram* which is the most immediately and the most universally appreciated. In both, it is of the lowest order of merit.

"What I mean to say is, that it is the mingled epigram and melodrama of the idea, that Marie Rogêt still lives, rather than any true plausibility in this idea, which have suggested it to *L'Etoile*, and secured it a favourable reception with the public. Let us examine the heads of this journal's argument; endeavouring to avoid the incoherence with which it is originally set forth.

"The first aim of the writer is to show, from the brevity of the interval between Marie's disappearance and the finding of the floating corpse, that this corpse cannot be that of Marie. The reduction of this interval to its smallest possible dimension, becomes thus, at once, an object with the reasoner. In the rash pursuit of this object, he rushes into mere assumption at the outset. 'It is folly to suppose,' he says, 'that the murder, if murder was committed on her body, could have been consummated soon enough to have enabled her murderers to throw the body into the river before midnight.' We demand at once, and very naturally, *why?* Why is it folly to suppose that the murder was committed *within five minutes* after the girl's quitting her mother's house? Why is it folly to suppose that the murder was committed at any given period of the day? There have been assassinations at all hours. But, had the murder taken place at any moment between nine o'clock in the morning of Sunday and a quarter before midnight, there would still have been time enough 'to throw the body into the river before midnight.' This assumption, then, amounts precisely to this—that the murder was not committed on Sunday at all—and, if we allow *L'Etoile* to assume this, we may permit it any liberties whatever. The paragraph beginning 'It is folly to suppose that the murder, etc.,' however it appears as printed in *L'Etoile*, may be imagined to have existed actually *thus* in the brain of the inditer: 'It is folly to suppose that the murder, if murder was committed on the body, could have been committed soon enough to have enabled her murderers to throw the body into the river before midnight; it is folly, we say, to suppose all this, and to suppose at the same time (as we are resolved to suppose), that the body was *not* thrown in until *after* midnight,'—a sentence sufficiently inconsequential in itself, but not so utterly preposterous as the one printed.

"Were it my purpose," continued Dupin, "merely to *make out a case* against this passage of *L'Etoile's* argument, I might safely leave it where it is. It is not, however, with *L'Etoile* that we have to do, but with the truth. The sentence in question has but one meaning, as it stands; and this meaning I have fairly stated; but it is material that we go behind the mere words for an idea which these words have obviously intended, and failed to convey. It was the design of the journalists to say that at whatever period of the day or night of Sunday this murder was committed, it was improbable that the assassins would have ventured to bear the corpse to the river before midnight. And herein lies, really, the assumption of which I complain. It is assumed that the murder was committed at such a position, and under such circumstances, that *the bearing it* to the river became necessary. Now, the assassination might have taken place

upon the river's brink, or on the river itself; and, thus, the throwing the corpse in the water might have been resorted to at any period of the day or night, as the most obvious and most immediate mode of disposal. You will understand that I suggest nothing here as probable, or as coincident with my own opinion. My design, so far, has no reference to the *facts* of the case. I wish merely to caution you against the whole tone of *L'Etoile's suggestion*, by calling your attention to its *ex-parte* character at the outset.

"Having prescribed thus a limit to suit its own preconceived notions; having assumed that, if this were the body of Marie, it could have been in the water but a very brief time, the journal goes on to say:

" 'All experience has shown that drowned bodies, or bodies thrown into the water immediately after death by violence, require from six to ten days for sufficient decomposition to take place to bring them to the top of the water. Even when a cannon is fired over a corpse, and it rises before at least five or six days' immersion, it sinks again if let alone.'

"These assertions have been tacitly received by every paper in Paris, with the exception of *Le Moniteur*.[14] This latter print endeavours to combat that portion of the paragraph which has reference to 'drowned bodies' only, by citing some five or six instances in which the bodies of individuals known to be drowned were found floating after the lapse of less time than is insisted upon by *L'Etoile*. But there is something excessively unphilosophical in the attempt, on the part of *Le Moniteur*, to rebut the general assertion of *L'Etoile*, by a citation of particular instances militating against that assertion. Had it been possible to adduce fifty instead of five examples of bodies found floating at the end of two or three days, these fifty examples could still have been properly regarded only as exceptions to *L'Etoile's* rule, until such time as the rule itself should be confuted. Admitting the rule (and this *Le Moniteur* does not deny, insisting merely upon its exceptions), the argument of *L'Etoile* is suffered to remain in full force; for this argument does not pretend to involve more than a question of the *probability* of the body having risen to the surface in less than three days; and this probability will be in favour of *L'Etoile's* position until the instances so childishly adduced shall be sufficient in number to establish an antagonistical rule.

"You will see at once that all argument upon this head should be urged, if at all, against the rule itself; and for this end we must examine the *rationale* of the rule. Now the human body, in general, is neither much lighter nor much heavier than the water of the Seine; that is to say, the specific gravity of the human body, in its natural condition, is about equal to the bulk of fresh water which it displaces. The bodies of fat and fleshy persons, with small bones, and of women generally, are lighter than those of the lean and large-boned, and of men; and the specific gravity of the water of a river is somewhat influenced by the presence of the tide from the sea. But, leaving this tide out of the question, it may be said that *very* few human bodies will sink at all, even in fresh water, *of their own accord*. Almost any one, falling into a river, will be enabled to

[14] The New York *Commercial Advertiser*, edited by Col. Stone.

float, if he suffer the specific gravity of the water fairly to be adduced in comparison with his own—that is to say, if he suffer his whole person to be immersed, with as little exception as possible. The proper position for one who cannot swim, is the upright position of the walker on land, with the head thrown fully back, and immersed; the mouth and nostrils alone remaining above the surface. Thus circumstanced, we shall find that we float without difficulty and without exertion. It is evident, however, that the gravities of the body, and of the bulk of water displaced, are very nicely balanced, and that a trifle will cause either to preponderate. An arm, for instance, uplifted from the water, and thus deprived of its support, is an additional weight sufficient to immerse the whole head, while the accidental aid of the smallest piece of timber will enable us to elevate the head so as to look about. Now, in the struggles of one unused to swimming, the arms are invariably thrown upward, while an attempt is made to keep the head in its usual perpendicular position. The result is the immersion of the mouth and nostrils, and the inception, during efforts to breathe while beneath the surface, of water into the lungs. Much is also received into the stomach, and the whole body becomes heavier by the difference between the weight of the air originally distending these cavities, and that of the fluid which now fills them. This difference is sufficient to cause the body to sink, as a general rule; but it is insufficient in the cases of individuals with small bones and an abnormal quantity of flaccid or fatty matter. Such individuals float even after drowning.

"The corpse, being supposed at the bottom of the river, will there remain until, by some means, its specific gravity again becomes less than that of the bulk of water which it displaces. This effect is brought about by decomposition, or otherwise. The result of decomposition is the generation of gas, distending the cellular tissues and all the cavities, and giving the *puffed* appearance which is so horrible. When this distension has so far progressed that the bulk of the corpse is materially increased without a corresponding increase of *mass* or weight, its specific gravity becomes less than that of the water displaced, and it forthwith makes its appearance at the surface. But decomposition is modified by innumerable circumstances—is hastened or retarded by innumerable agencies; for example, by the heat or cold of the season, by the mineral impregnation or purity of the water, by its depth or shallowness, by its currency or stagnation, by the temperament of the body, by its infection or freedom from disease before death. Thus it is evident that we can assign no period, with anything like accuracy, at which the corpse shall rise through decomposition. Under certain conditions this result would be brought about within an hour; under others it might not take place at all. There are chemical infusions by which the animal frame can be preserved *for ever* from corruption; the bichloride of mercury is one. But, apart from decomposition, there may be, and very usually is, a generation of gas within the stomach, from the acetous fermentation of vegetable matter (or within other cavities from other causes), sufficient to induce a distension which will bring the body to the surface. The effect produced by the firing of a cannon is that of simple vibration. This may either loosen the corpse from the soft mud or ooze in which it is embedded, thus permitting it to rise when other agencies have

already prepared it for so doing: or it may overcome the tenacity of some putrescent portions of the cellular tissues, allowing the cavities to distend under the influence of the gas.

"Having thus before us the whole philosophy of this subject, we can easily test by it the assertions of *L'Etoile*. 'All experience shows,' says this paper, 'that drowned bodies, or bodies thrown into the water immediately after death by violence, require from six to ten days for sufficient decomposition to take place to bring them to the top of the water. Even when a cannon is fired over a corpse, and it rises before at least five or six days' immersion, it sinks again if let alone.'

"The whole of this paragraph must now appear a tissue of inconsequence and incoherence. All experience does *not* show that 'drowned bodies' *require* from six to ten days for sufficient decomposition to take place to bring them to the surface. Both science and experience show that the period of their rising is, and necessarily must be, indeterminate. If, moreover, a body has risen to the surface through firing of cannon, it will *not* 'sink again if let alone,' until decomposition has so far progressed as to permit the escape of the generated gas. But I wish to call your attention to the distinction which is made between 'drowned bodies,' and 'bodies thrown into water immediately after death by violence.' Although the writer admits the distinction, he yet includes them all in the same category. I have shown how it is that the body of a drowning man becomes specifically heavier than its bulk of water, and that he would not sink at all, except for the struggle by which he elevates his arms above the surface, and his gasps for breath while beneath the surface—gasps which supply by water the place of the original air in the lungs. But these struggles and these gasps would not occur in the body 'thrown into the water immediately after death by violence.' Thus, in the latter instance, *the body, as a general rule, would not sink at all*—a fact of which *L'Etoile* is evidently ignorant. When decomposition had proceeded to a very great extent—when the flesh had in a great measure left the bones—then, indeed, but not *till* then, should we lose sight of the corpse.

"And now what are we to make of the argument, that the body found could not be that of Marie Rogêt, because, three days only having elapsed, this body was found floating? If drowned, being a woman, she might never have sunk; or, having sunk, might have reappeared in twenty-four hours or less. But no one supposes her to have been drowned; and dying before being thrown into the river, she might have been found floating at any period afterward whatever.

" 'But,' says *L'Etoile*, 'if the body had been kept in its mangled state on shore until Tuesday night, some trace would be found on shore of the murderers.' Here it is at first difficult to perceive the intention of the reasoner. He means to anticipate what he imagines would be an objection to his theory—viz.: that the body was kept on shore two days, suffering rapid decomposition—*more* rapid than if immersed in water. He supposes that, had this been the case, it *might* have appeared at the surface on the Wednesday, and thinks that *only* under such circumstances it could have so appeared. He is accordingly in haste to show that it *was not* kept on shore; for, if so, 'some trace would be found on shore of the murderers.' I presume you smile at the *sequitur*. You cannot be made to

see how the mere *duration* of the corpse on the shore could operate to *multiply* traces of the assassins. Nor can I.

"'And furthermore it is exceedingly improbable,' continues our journal, 'that any villains who had committed such a murder as is here supposed, would have thrown the body in without weight to sink it, when such a precaution could have so easily been taken.' Observe, here, the laughable confusion of thought! No one—not even *L'Etoile*—disputes the murder committed *on the body found*. The marks of violence are too obvious. It is our reasoner's object merely to show that this body is not Marie's. He wishes to prove that *Marie* is not assassinated—not that the corpse was not. Yet his observation proves only the latter point. Here is a corpse without weight attached. Murderers, casting it in, would not have failed to attach a weight. Therefore it was not thrown in by murderers. This is all which is proved, if anything is. The question of identity is not even approached, and *L'Etoile* has been at great pains merely to gainsay now what it has admitted only a moment before. 'We are perfectly convinced,' it says, 'that the body found was that of a murdered female.'

"Nor is this the sole instance, even in this division of his subject, where our reasoner unwittingly reasons against himself. His evident object, I have already said, is to reduce, as much as possible, the interval between Marie's disappearance and the finding of the corpse. Yet we find him *urging* the point that no person saw the girl from the moment of her leaving her mother's house. 'We have no evidence,' he says, 'that Marie Rogêt was in the land of the living after nine o'clock on Sunday, June the 22nd.' As his argument is obviously an *ex-parte* one, he should, at least, have left this matter out of sight; for had any one been known to see Marie, say on Monday, or on Tuesday, the interval in question would have been much reduced, and, by his own ratiocination, the probability much diminished of the corpse being that of the *grisette*. It is, nevertheless, amusing to observe that *L'Etoile* insists upon its point in the full belief of its furthering its general argument.

"Re-peruse now that portion of this argument which has reference to the identification of the corpse by Beauvais. In regard to the *hair* upon the arm, *L'Etoile* has been obviously disingenuous. M. Beauvais, not being an idiot, could never have urged in identification of the corpse, simply *hair upon its arm*. No arm is *without* hair. The *generality* of the expression of *L'Etoile* is a mere perversion of the witness' phraseology. He must have spoken of some *peculiarity* in this hair. It must have been a peculiarity of colour, of quantity, of length, or of situation.

"'Her foot,' says the journal, 'was small—so are thousands of feet. Her garter is no proof whatever—nor is her shoe—for shoes and garters are sold in packages. The same may be said of the flowers in her hat. One thing upon which M. Beauvais strongly insists is, that the clasp on the garter found had been set back to take it in. This amounts to nothing; for most women find it proper to take a pair of garters home and fit them to the size of the limb they are to encircle, rather than to try them in the store where they purchase.' Here it is

difficult to suppose the reasoner in earnest. Had M. Beauvais, in his search for the body of Marie, discovered a corpse corresponding in general size and appearance to the missing girl, he would have been warranted (without reference to the question of habiliment at all) in forming an opinion that his search had been successful. If, in addition to the point of general size and contour, he had found upon the arm a peculiar hairy appearance which he had observed upon the living Marie, his opinion might have been justly strengthened; and the increase of positiveness might well have been in the ratio of the peculiarity, or unusualness of the hairy mark. If the feet of Marie being small, those of the corpse were also small, the increase of probability that the body was that of Marie would not be an increase in a ratio merely arithmetical, but in one highly geometrical, or accumulative. Add to all this shoes such as she had been known to wear upon the day of her disappearance, and, although these shoes may be 'sold in packages,' you so far augment the probability as to verge upon the certain. What, of itself, would be no evidence of identity, becomes, through its corroborative position, proof most sure. Give us then, flowers in the hat corresponding to those worn by the missing girl, and we seek for nothing further. If only *one* flower, we seek for nothing further—what then if two or three, or more? Each successive one is multiple evidence—proof not *added* to proof, but *multiplied* by hundreds or thousands. Let us now discover, upon the deceased, garters such as the living used, and it is almost folly to proceed. But these garters are found to be tightened, by the setting back of a clasp, in just such a manner as her own had been tightened by Marie shortly previous to her leaving home. It is now madness or hypocrisy to doubt. What *L'Etoile* says in respect to this abbreviation of the garters being an unusual occurrence, shows nothing beyond its own pertinacity in error. The elastic nature of the clasp-garter is self-demonstration of the *unusualness* of the abbreviation. What is made to adjust itself, must of necessity require foreign adjustment but rarely. It must have been by an accident, in its strictest sense, that these garters of Marie needed the tightening described. They alone would have amply established her identity. But it is not that the corpse was found to have the garters of the missing girl, or found to have her shoes, or her bonnet, or the flowers of her bonnet, or her feet, or a peculiar mark upon the arm, or her general size and appearance—it is that the corpse had each, and *all collectively*. Could it be proved that the editor of *L'Etoile really* entertained a doubt, under the circumstances, there would be no need, in his case, of a commission *de lunatico inquirendo*. He has thought it sagacious to echo the small talk of the lawyers, who, for the most part, content themselves with echoing the rectangular precepts of the courts. I would here observe that very much of what is rejected as evidence by a court is the best of evidence to the intellect. For the court, guided itself by the general principles—of evidence—the recognised and *booked* principles—is averse from swerving at particular instances. And this steadfast adherence to principle, with rigorous disregard of the conflicting exception, is a sure mode of attaining the *maximum* of attainable truth, in any long sequence of time. The practice, *en masse*, is there-

fore philosophical; but it is not the less certain that it engenders vast individual error.[15]

"In respect to the insinuations levelled at Beauvais, you will be willing to dismiss them in a breath. You have already fathomed the true character of this good gentleman. He is a *busy-body*, with much of romance and little of wit. Any one so constituted will readily so conduct himself, upon occasion of *real* excitement, as to render himself liable to suspicion on the part of the over-acute, or the ill-disposed. M. Beauvais (as it appears from your notes) had some personal interviews with the editor of *L'Etoile*, and offended him by venturing an opinion that the corpse, notwithstanding the theory of the editor, was, in sober fact, that of Marie. 'He persists,' says the paper, 'in asserting the corpse to be that of Marie, but cannot give a circumstance, in addition to those which we have commented upon, to make others believe.' Now, without re-adverting to the fact that stronger evidence 'to make others believe,' could *never* have been adduced, it may be remarked that a man may very well be understood to believe, in a case of this kind, without the ability to advance a single reason for the belief of a second party. Nothing is more vague than impressions of individual identity. Each man recognises his neighbour, yet there are few instances in which any one is prepared *to give a reason* for his recognition. The editor of *L'Etoile* had no right to be offended at M. Beauvais' unreasoning belief.

"The suspicious circumstances which invest him, will be found to tally much better with my hypothesis of *romantic busy-bodyism*, than with the reasoner's suggestion of guilt. Once adopting the more charitable interpretation, we shall find no difficulty in comprehending the rose in the key-hole; the 'Marie' upon the slate; the 'elbowing the male relatives out of the way'; the 'aversion to permitting them to see the body'; the caution given to Madame B——, that she must hold no conversation with the *gendarme* until his (Beauvais') return; and, lastly, his apparent determination, 'that nobody should have anything to do with the proceedings except himself.' It seems to me unquestionable that Beauvais was a suitor of Marie's; that she coquetted with him; and that he was ambitious of being thought to enjoy her fullest intimacy and confidence. I shall say nothing more upon this point; and, as the evidence fully rebuts the assertion of *L'Etoile*, touching the matter of *apathy* on the part of the mother and other relatives—an apathy inconsistent with the supposition of their believing the corpse to be that of the perfumery-girl—we shall now proceed as if the question of *identity* were settled to our perfect satisfaction."

"And what," I here demanded, "do you think of the opinions of *Le Commerciel*?"

[15] "A theory based on the qualities of an object, will prevent its being unfolded according to its objects; and he who arranges topics in reference to their causes, will cease to value them according to their results. Thus the jurisprudence of every nation will show that, when law becomes a science and a system, it ceases to be justice. The errors into which a blind devotion to *principles* of classification has led the common law, will be seen by observing how often the legislature has been obliged to come forward to restore the equity its scheme had lost."—*Landor.*

"That in spirit, they are far more worthy of attention than any which have been promulgated upon the subject. The deductions from the premises are philosophical and acute; but the premises, in two instances, at least, are founded in imperfect observation. *Le Commerciel* wishes to intimate that Marie was seized by some gang of low ruffians not far from her mother's door. 'It is impossible,' it urges, 'that a person so well known to thousands as this young woman was, should have passed three blocks without some one having seen her.' This is the idea of a man long resident in Paris—a public man—and one whose walks to and fro in the city have been mostly limited to the vicinity of the public offices. He is aware that he seldom passes so far as a dozen blocks from his own *bureau*, without being recognised and accosted. And, knowing the extent of his personal acquaintance with others, and of others with him, he compares his notoriety with that of the perfumery-girl, finds no great difference between them, and reaches at once the conclusion that she, in her walks, would be equally liable to recognition with himself in his. This could only be the case were her walks of the same unvarying methodical character, and within the same *species* of limited region as are his own. He passes to and fro, at regular intervals, within a confined periphery, abounding in individuals who are led to observation of his person through interest in the kindred nature of his occupation with their own. But the walks of Marie may, in general, be supposed discursive. In this particular instance, it will be understood as most probable that she proceeded upon a route of more than average diversity, from her accustomed ones. The parallel which we imagine to have existed in the mind of *Le Commerciel* would only be sustained in the event of the two individuals traversing the whole city. In this case, granting the personal acquaintance to be equal, the chances would be also equal that an equal number of personal *rencontres* would be made. For my own part, I should hold it not only as possible, but as far more than probable, that Marie might have proceeded, at any given period, by any one of the many routes between her own residence and that of her aunt without meeting a single individual whom she knew, or by whom she was known. In viewing this question in its full and proper light, we must hold steadily in mind the great disproportion between the personal acquaintances of even the most noted individuals in Paris, and the entire population of Paris itself.

"But whatever force there may still appear to be in the suggestion of *Le Commerciel*, will be much diminished when we take into consideration *the hour* at which the girl went abroad. 'It was when the streets were full of people,' says *Le Commerciel*, 'that she went out.' But not so. It was at nine o'clock in the morning. Now at nine o'clock of every morning in the week, *with the exception of Sunday*, the streets in the city are, it is true, thronged with people. At nine on Sunday, the populace are chiefly within doors *preparing for church*. No observing person can have failed to notice the peculiarly deserted air of the town, from about eight until ten on the morning of every Sabbath. Between ten and eleven the streets are thronged, but not at so early a period as that designated.

"There is another point at which there seems a deficiency of *observation* on

the part of *Le Commerciel*. 'A piece,' it says, 'of one of the unfortunate girl's petticoats, two feet long, and one foot wide, was torn out and tied under her chin, and around the back of her head, probably to prevent screams. This was done by fellows who had no pocket-handkerchief.' Whether this idea is or is not well founded, we will endeavour to see hereafter; but by 'fellows who have no pocket-handkerchiefs,' the editor intends the lowest class of ruffians. These, however, are the very description of people who will always be found to have handkerchiefs even when destitute of shirts. You must have had occasion to observe how absolutely indispensable, of late years, to the thorough blackguard, has become the pocket-handkerchief."

"And what are we to think," I asked, "of the article in *Le Soleil*?"

"That it is a vast pity its inditer was not born a parrot—in which case he would have been the most illustrious parrot of his race. He has merely repeated the individual items of the already published opinion; collecting them, with a laudable industry, from this paper and from that. 'The things had all *evidently* been there,' he says, 'at least three or four weeks, and there can be *no doubt* that the spot of this appalling outrage has been discovered.' The facts here re-stated by *Le Soleil* are very far indeed from removing my own doubts upon this subject, and we will examine them more particularly hereafter in connection with another division of the theme.

"At present we must occupy ourselves with other investigations. You cannot fail to have remarked the extreme laxity of the examination of the corpse. To be sure, the question of identity was readily determined, or should have been; but there were other points to be ascertained. Had the body been in any respect *despoiled*? Had the deceased any articles of jewellery about her person upon leaving home? if so, had she any when found? These are important questions utterly untouched by the evidence; and there are others of equal moment, which have met with no attention. We must endeavour to satisfy ourselves by personal enquiry. The case of St. Eustache must be re-examined. I have no suspicion of this person; but let us proceed methodically. We will ascertain beyond a doubt the validity of the *affidavits* in regard to his whereabouts on the Sunday. Affidavits of this character are readily made matter of mystification. Should there be nothing wrong here, however, we will dismiss St. Eustache from our investigations. His suicide, however corroborative of suspicion, were there found to be deceit in the affidavits, is, without such deceit, in no respect an unaccountable circumstance, or one which need cause us to deflect from the line of ordinary analysis.

"In that which I now propose, we will discard the interior points of this tragedy, and concentrate our attention upon its outskirts. Not the least usual error in investigations such as this is the limiting of enquiry to the immediate, with total disregard of the collateral or circumstantial events. It is the malpractice of the courts to confine evidence and discussion to the bounds of apparent relevancy. Yet experience has shown, and a true philosophy will always show, that a vast, perhaps the larger portion of truth arises from the seemingly irrelevant. It is through the spirit of this principle, if not precisely through its

letter, that modern science has resolved to *calculate upon the unforeseen*. But perhaps you do not comprehend me. The history of human knowledge has so uninterruptedly shown that to collateral, or incidental, or accidental events we are indebted for the most numerous and most valuable discoveries, that it has at length become necessary, in prospective views of improvement, to make not only large, but the largest, allowances for inventions that shall arise by chance, and quite out of the range of ordinary expectation. It is no longer philosophical to base upon what has been a vision of what is to be. *Accident* is admitted as a portion of the substructure. We make chance a matter of absolute calculation. We subject the unlooked-for and unimagined to the mathematical *formulæ* of the schools.

"I repeat that it is more than fact that the *larger* portion of all truth has sprung from the collateral; and it is but in accordance with the spirit of the principle involved in this fact that I would divert enquiry, in the present case, from the trodden and hitherto unfruitful ground of the event itself to the contemporary circumstances which surround it. While you ascertain the validity of the affidavits, I will examine the newspapers more generally than you have as yet done. So far, we have only reconnoitred the field of investigation; but it will be strange, indeed, if a comprehensive survey, such as I propose, of the public prints will not afford us some minute points which shall establish a *direction* for enquiry."

In pursuance of Dupin's suggestion, I made scrupulous examination of the affair of the affidavits. The result was a firm conviction of their validity, and of the consequent innocence of St. Eustache. In the meantime my friend occupied himself, with what seemed to me a minuteness altogether objectless, in a scrutiny of the various newspaper files. At the end of a week he placed before me the following extracts:

"About three years and a half ago, a disturbance very similar to the present was caused by the disappearance of this same Marie Rogêt from the *parfumerie* of Monsieur Le Blanc, in the Palais Royal. At the end of a week, however, she re-appeared at her customary *comptoir*, as well as ever, with the exception of a slight paleness not altogether usual. It was given out by Monsieur Le Blanc and her mother that she had merely been on a visit to some friend in the country; and the affair was speedily hushed up. We presume that the present absence is a freak of the same nature, and that, at the expiration of a week or, perhaps, of a month, we shall have her among us again."—*Evening Paper*, Monday, June 23rd.[16]

"An evening journal of yesterday refers to a former mysterious disappearance of Mademoiselle Rogêt. It is well known that, during the week of her absence from Le Blanc's *parfumerie*, she was in the company of a young naval officer much noted for his debaucheries. A quarrel, it is supposed, providentially led to her return home. We have the name of the Lothario in question, who is at

[16] New York *Express*.

present stationed in Paris, but for obvious reasons, forbear to make it public." —*Le Mercure*, Tuesday morning June 24th.[17]

"An outrage of the most atrocious character was perpetrated near this city the day before yesterday. A gentleman, with his wife and daughter, engaged about dusk, the services of six young men, who were idly rowing a boat to and fro near the banks of the Seine to convey him across the river. Upon reaching the opposite shore the three passengers stepped out, and had proceeded so far as to be beyond the view of the boat, when the daughter discovered that she had left in it her parasol. She returned for it, was seized by the gang, carried out into the stream, gagged, brutally treated, and finally taken to the shore at a point not far from that at which she had originally entered the boat with her parents. The villains have escaped for the time, but the police are upon their trail, and some of them will soon be taken."—*Morning Paper*, June 25th.[18]

"We have received one or two communications, the object of which is to fasten the crime of the late atrocity upon Mennais;[19] but as this gentleman has been fully exonerated by a legal inquiry, and as the arguments of our several correspondents appear to be more zealous than profound, we do not think it advisable to make them public."—*Morning Paper*, June 28th.[20]

"We have received several forcibly written communications, apparently from various sources, and which go far to render it a matter of certainty that the unfortunate Marie Rogêt has become a victim of one of the numerous bands of blackguards which infest the vicinity of the city upon Sunday. Our own opinion is decidedly in favour of this supposition. We shall endeavour to make room for some of these arguments hereafter."—*Evening Paper*, Monday, June 30th.[21]

"On Monday, one of the bargemen connected with the revenue service saw an empty boat floating down the Seine. Sails were lying in the bottom of the boat. The bargeman towed it under the barge office. The next morning it was taken from thence without the knowledge of any of the officers. The rudder is now at the barge office."—*La Diligence*, Thursday, June 26th.[22]

Upon reading these various extracts, they not only seemed to me irrelevant, but I could perceive no mode in which any one of them could be brought to bear upon the matter in hand. I waited for some explanation from Dupin.

"It is not my present design," he said, "to *dwell* upon the first and second of these extracts. I have copied them chiefly to show you the extreme remissness of the police, who, as far as I can understand from the Prefect, have not troubled themselves, in any respect, with an examination of the naval officer alluded to. Yet it is mere folly to say that between the first and second disappearance of Marie there is no *supposable* connection. Let us admit the first

[17] New York *Herald*.
[18] New York *Courier and Inquirer*.
[19] Mennais was one of the parties originally suspected and arrested, but discharged through total lack of evidence.
[20] New York *Courier and Inquirer*.
[21] New York *Evening Post*.
[22] New York *Standard*.

elopement to have resulted in a quarrel between the lovers, and the return home of the betrayed. We are now prepared to view a second *elopement* (if we *know* that an elopement has again taken place) as indicating a renewal of the betrayer's advances rather than as the result of new proposals by a second individual—we are prepared to regard it as a 'making up' of the old *amour*, rather than as the commencement of a new one. The chances are ten to one, that he who had once eloped with Marie would again propose an elopement, rather than that she to whom proposals of elopement had been made by one individual, should have them made to her by another. And here let me call your attention to the fact that the time elapsing between the first ascertained and the second supposed elopement is a few months more than the general period of the cruises of our men-of-war. Had the lover been interrupted in his first villainy by the necessity of departure to sea, and had he seized the first moment of his return to renew the base designs not yet altogether accomplished—or not yet altogether accomplished *by him*? Of all these things we know nothing.

"You will say, however, that, in the second instance, there was *no* elopement as imagined. Certainly not—but are we prepared to say that there was not the frustrated design? Beyond St. Eustache and perhaps Beauvais, we find no recognized, no open, no honourable suitors of Marie. Of none other is there anything said. Who then, is the secret lover, of whom the relatives (*at least most of them*) know nothing, but whom Marie meets upon the morning of Sunday, and who is so deeply in her confidence, that she hesitates not to remain with him until the shades of the evening descend, amid the solitary groves of the Barrière du Roule? Who is that secret lover, I ask, of whom, at least, *most* of the relatives know nothing? And what means the singular prophecy of Madame Rogêt on the morning of Marie's departure—'I fear that I shall never see Marie again.'

"But if we cannot imagine Madame Rogêt privy to the design of elopement, may we not at least suppose this design entertained by the girl? Upon quitting home, she gave it to be understood that she was about to visit her aunt in the Rue des Drômes, and St. Eustache was requested to call for her at dark. Now, at first glance, this fact strongly militates against my suggestion; but let us reflect. That she *did* meet some companion, and proceeded with him across the river, reaching the Barrière du Roule at so late an hour as three o'clock in the afternoon, is known. But in consenting so to accompany this individual (*for whatever purpose—to her mother known or unknown*), she must have thought of her expressed intention when leaving home, and of the surprise and suspicion aroused in the bosom of her affianced suitor, St. Eustache, when, calling for her, at the hour appointed, in the Rue des Drômes, he should find that she had not been there, and when, moreover, upon returning to the *pension* with this alarming intelligence, he should become aware of her continued absence from home. She must have thought of these things, I say. She must have foreseen the chagrin of St. Eustache, the suspicion of all. She could not have thought of returning to brave this suspicion; but the suspicion becomes a point of trivial importance to her, if we suppose her *not* intending to return.

"We may imagine her thinking thus—'I am to meet a certain person for the purpose of elopement, or for certain other purposes known only to myself. It is necessary that there be no chance of interruption—there must be a sufficient time given us to elude pursuit—I will give it to be understood that I shall visit and spend the day with my aunt at the Rue des Drômes—I will tell St. Eustache not to call for me until dark—in this way, my absence from home for the longest possible period, without causing suspicion or anxiety, will be accounted for, and I shall gain more time than in any other manner. If I bid St. Eustache call for me at dark, he will be sure not to call before; but if I wholly neglect to bid him call, my time for escape will be diminished, since it will be expected that I return the earlier, and my absence will the sooner excite anxiety. Now, if it were my design to return *at all*—if I had in contemplation merely a stroll with the individual in question—it would not be my policy to bid St. Eustache call; for, calling, he will be *sure* to ascertain that I have played him false—a fact of which I might keep him for ever in ignorance, by leaving home without notifying him of my intention, by returning before dark, and by then stating that I had been to visit my aunt in the Rue des Drômes. But, as it is my design *never* to return—or not for some weeks—or not until certain concealments are effected—the gaining of time is the only point about which I need give myself any concern.'

"You have observed, in your notes, that the most general opinion in relation to this sad affair is, and was from the first, that the girl had been the victim of a *gang* of blackguards. Now, the popular opinion, under certain conditions, is not to be disregarded. When arising of itself—when manifesting itself in a strictly spontaneous manner—we should look upon it as analogous with that *intuition* which is the idiosyncrasy of the individual man of genius. In ninety-nine cases from the hundred I would abide by its decision. But it is important that we find no palpable traces of *suggestion*. The opinion must be rigorously *the public's own*; and the distinction is often exceedingly difficult to perceive and to maintain. In the present instance, it appears to me that this 'public opinion,' in respect to a *gang*, has been superinduced by the collateral event which is detailed in the third of my extracts. All Paris is excited by the discovered corpse of Marie, a girl young, beautiful, and notorious. This corpse is found, bearing marks of violence, and floating in the river. But it is now made known that, at the very period, or about the very period, in which it is supposed that the girl was assassinated, an outrage similar in nature to that endured by the deceased, although less in extent, was perpetrated, by a gang of young ruffians, upon the person of a second young female. Is it wonderful that the one known atrocity should influence the popular judgment in regard to the other unknown? This judgment awaited direction, and the known outrage seemed so opportunely to afford it! Marie, too, was found in the river; and upon this very river was this known outrage committed? The connection of the two events had about it so much of the palpable, that the true wonder would have been a *failure* of the populace to appreciate and to seize it. But, in fact, the one atrocity known to be so committed, is, if anything, evidence that the other, committed at a time nearly coincident, was *not* so committed. It would have been

a miracle indeed, if, while a gang of ruffians were perpetrating, at a given locality, a most unheard-of wrong, there should have been another similar gang, in a similar locality, in the same city, under the same circumstances, with the same means and appliances, engaged in a wrong of precisely the same aspect, at precisely the same period of time! Yet in what, if not in this marvellous train of coincidence, does the accidentally *suggested* opinion of the populace call upon us to believe?

"Before proceeding further, let us consider the supposed scene of the assassination, in the thicket at the Barrière du Roule. This thicket, although dense, was in the close vicinity of a public road. Within were three or four large stones forming a kind of seat with a back and a footstool. On the upper stone was discovered a white petticoat; on the second, a silk scarf. A parasol, gloves, and a pocket-handkerchief were also here found. The handkerchief bore the name 'Marie Rogêt.' Fragments of dress were seen on the branches around. The earth was trampled, the bushes were broken and there was every evidence of a violent struggle.

"Notwithstanding the acclamation with which the discovery of this thicket was received by the press, and the unanimity with which it was supposed to indicate the precise scene of the outrage, it must be admitted that there was some very good reason for doubt. That it *was* the scene, I may or I may not believe—but there was excellent reason for doubt. Had the *true* scene been, as *Le Commerciel* suggested, in the neighbourhood of the Rue Pavée St. Andrée, the perpetrators of the crime, supposing them still resident in Paris, would naturally have been stricken with terror at the public attention thus acutely directed into the proper channel; and, in certain classes of minds, there would have arisen, at once, a sense of the necessity of some exertion to redivert the attention. And thus, the thicket of the Barrière du Roule having been already suspected, the idea of placing the articles where they were found might have been naturally entertained. There is no real evidence, although *Le Soleil* so supposes, that the articles discovered had been more than a few days in the thicket; while there is much circumstantial proof that they could not have remained there, without attracting attention, during the twenty days elapsing beween the fatal Sunday and the afternoon upon which they were found by the boys. 'They were all *mildewed* down hard,' says *Le Soleil*, adopting the opinions of its predecessors, 'with the action of the rain and stuck together from *mildew*. The grass had grown around and over some of them. The silk of the parasol was strong, but the threads of it were run together within. The upper part, where it had been doubled and folded, was all *mildewed* and rotten, and tore on being opened.' In respect to the grass having 'grown round and over some of them,' it is obvious that the fact could only have been ascertained from the words, and thus from the recollections, of two small boys; for these boys removed the articles and took them home before they had been seen by a third party. But the grass will grow, especially in warm and damp weather (such as was that of the period of the murder), as much as two or three inches in a single day. A parasol lying upon a newly turfed ground, might, in a single week, be entirely

concealed from sight by the upspringing grass. And touching that *mildew* upon which the editor of *Le Soleil* so pertinaciously insists, that he employs the word no less than three times in the brief paragraph just quoted, is he really unaware of the nature of this *mildew*? Is he to be told that it is one of many classes of *fungus*, of which the most ordinary feature is its upspringing and decadence within twenty-four hours?

"Thus we see, at a glance, that what has been most triumphantly adduced in support of the idea that the articles had been 'for at least three or four weeks' in the thicket, is most absurdly null as regards any evidence of that fact. On the other hand, it is exceedingly difficult to believe that these articles could have remained in the thicket specified for a longer period than a single week —for a longer period than from one Sunday to the next. Those who know anything of the vicinity of Paris, know the extreme difficulty of finding *seclusion*, unless at a great distance from its suburbs. Such a thing as an unexplored or even an unfrequently visited recess, amid its woods or groves, is not for a moment to be imagined. Let any one who, being at heart a lover of nature, is yet chained by duty to the dust and heat of this great metropolis—let any such one attempt, even during the week-days, to slake his thirst for solitude amid the scenes of natural loveliness which immediately surround us. At every second step, he will find the growing charm dispelled by the voice and personal intrusion of some ruffian or party of carousing blackguards. He will seek privacy amid the densest foliage all in vain. Here are the very nooks where the unwashed most abound —here are the temples most desecrate. With sickness of the heart the wanderer will flee back to the polluted Paris as to a less odious because less incongruous sink of pollution. But if the vicinity of the city is so beset during the working days of the week, how much more so on the Sabbath! It is now especially that, released from the claims of labour, or deprived of the customary opportunities of crime, the town blackguard seeks the precincts of the town, not through love of the rural, which in his heart he despises, but by way of escape from the restraints and conventionalities of society. He desires less the fresh air and the green trees, than the utter *licence* of the country. Here at the roadside inn, or beneath the foliage of the woods, he indulges, unchecked by any eye except those of his boon companions, in all the mad excess of a counterfeit hilarity—the joint offspring of liberty and of rum. I say nothing more than what must be obvious to every dispassionate observer, when I repeat that the circumstances of the articles in question having remained undiscovered, for a longer period than from one Sunday to another, in *any* thicket in the immediate neighbourhood of Paris, is to be looked upon as little less than miraculous.

"But there are not wanting other grounds for the suspicion that the articles were placed in the thicket with the view of diverting attention from the real scene of the outrage. And, first, let me direct your notice to the *date* of the discovery of the articles. Collate this with the date of the fifth extract made by myself from the newspapers. You will find that the discovery followed, almost immediately, the urgent communications sent to the evening paper. These communications, although various, and apparently from various sources, tended

all to the same point—viz., the directing of attention to *a gang* as the perpetrators of the outrage, and to the neighbourhood of the Barrière du Roule as its scene. Now, here, of course, the situation is not that, in consequence of these communications, or of the public attention by them directed, the articles were found by the boys; but the suspicion might and may well have been, that the articles were not *before* found by the boys, for the reason that the articles had not before been in the thicket; having been deposited there only at so late a period as at the date, or shortly prior to the date of the communications, by the guilty authors of these communications themselves.

"This thicket was a singular—an exceedingly singular one. It was unusually dense. Within its natural wall enclosure were three extraordinary stones, *forming a seat with a back and a footstool.* And this thicket, so full of art, was in the immediate vicinity, *within a few rods,* of the dwelling of Madame Deluc, whose boys were in the habit of closely examining the shrubberies about them in search of the bark of the sassafras. Would it be a rash wager—a wager of one thousand to one—that a *day* never passed over the heads of these boys without finding at least one of them ensconced in the umbrageous hall, and enthroned upon its natural throne? Those who would hesitate at such a wager, have either never been boys themselves, or have forgotten the boyish nature. I repeat—it is exceedingly hard to comprehend how the articles could have remained in this thicket undiscovered, for a longer period than one or two days; and that thus there is good ground for suspicion, in spite of the dogmatic ignorance of *Le Soleil,* that they were, at a comparatively late date, deposited where found.

"But there are still other and stronger reasons for believing them so deposited, than any which I have as yet urged. And, now, let me beg your notice to the highly artificial arrangement of the articles. On the *upper* stone lay a white petticoat; on the *second,* a silk scarf; scattered around were a parasol, gloves, and a pocket-handkerchief bearing the name 'Marie Rogêt.' Here is just such an arrangement as would *naturally* be made by a not over-acute person wishing to dispose the articles *naturally.* But it is by no means a *really* natural arrangement. I should rather have looked to see the things *all* lying on the ground and trampled under foot. In the narrow limits of that bower, it would have been scarcely possible that the petticoat and scarf should have retained a position upon the stones, when subjected to the brushing to and fro of many struggling persons. 'There was evidence,' it is said, 'of a struggle; and the earth was trampled, the bushes were broken,'—but the petticoat and the scarf are found deposited as if upon shelves. 'The pieces of the frock torn out by the bushes were about three inches wide and six inches long. One part was the hem of the frock, and it had been mended. They *looked like strips torn off.*' Here, inadvertently, *Le Soleil* has employed an exceedingly suspicious phrase. The pieces, as described, do indeed 'look like strips torn off'; but purposely and by hand. It is one of the rarest of accidents that a piece is 'torn off' from any garment such as is now in question, by the agency *of a thorn.* From the very nature of such fabrics, a thorn or nail becoming entangled in them, tears them rectangularly —divides them into two longitudinal rents, at right angles with each other, and

meeting at an apex where the thorn enters—but it is scarcely possible to conceive the piece 'torn off.' I never so knew it, nor did you. To tear a piece *off* from such fabric, two distinct forces, in different directions, will be, in almost every case, required. If there be two edges to the fabric—if, for example, it be a pocket-handkerchief, and it is desired to tear from it a slip, then, and then only, will the one force serve the purpose. But in the present case the question is of a dress, presenting but one edge. To tear a piece from the interior, where no edge is presented, could only be effected by a miracle through the agency of thorns, and no *one* thorn could accomplish it. But, even where an edge is presented, two thorns will be necessary, operating, the one in two distinct directions, and the other in one. And this in the supposition that the edge is unhemmed. If hemmed, the matter is nearly out of the question. We thus see the numerous and great obstacles in the way of pieces being 'torn off' through the simple agency of 'thorns'; yet we are required to believe not only that one piece but that many have been so torn. 'And one part,' too *'was the hem of the frock!'* Another piece was *'part of the skirt, not the hem,'*—that is to say, was torn completely out, through the agency of thorns, from the unedged interior of the dress! These, I say, are things which one may well be pardoned for disbelieving; yet, taken collectively, they form, perhaps, less of reasonable ground for suspicion, than the one startling circumstance of the articles having been left in this thicket at all, by any *murderers* who had enough precaution to think of removing the corpse. You will not have apprehended me rightly, however, if you suppose it my design to *deny* this thicket as the scene of the outrage. There might have been a wrong *here*, or, more possibly, an accident at Madame Deluc's. But, in fact, this is a point of minor importance. We are not engaged in an attempt to discover the scene, but to produce the perpetrators of the murder. What I have adduced, notwithstanding the minuteness with which I have adduced it, has been with the view, first, to show the folly of the positive and headlong assertions of *Le Soleil*, but secondly and chiefly, to bring you, by the most natural route, to a further contemplation of the doubt whether this assassination has, or has not, been the work of *a gang*.

"We will resume this question by mere allusion to the revolting details of the surgeon examined at the inquest. It is only necessary to say that his published *inferences*, in regard to the number of the ruffians, have been properly ridiculed as unjust and totally baseless, by all the reputable anatomists of Paris. Not that the matter *might not* have been as inferred, but that there was no ground for the inference:—was there not much for another?

"Let us reflect now upon 'the traces of a struggle'; and let me ask what these traces have been supposed to demonstrate. A gang. But do they not rather demonstrate the absence of a gang? What *struggle* could have taken place—what struggle so violent and so enduring as to have left its 'traces' in all directions—between a weak and defenceless girl and the *gang* of ruffians imagined? The silent grasp of a few rough arms and all would have been over. The victim must have been absolutely passive at their will. You will here bear in mind that the arguments used against the thicket as the scene, are applicable, in chief part,

only against it as the scene of an outrage committed by *more than a single individual*. If we imagine but *one* violater, we can conceive, and thus only conceive, the struggle of so violent and so obstinate a nature as to have left the 'traces' apparent.

"And again. I have already mentioned the suspicion to be excited by the fact that the articles in question were suffered to remain *at all* in the thicket where discovered. It seems almost impossible that these evidences of guilt should have been accidentally left where found. There was sufficient presence of mind (it is supposed) to remove the corpse; and yet a more positive evidence than the corpse itself (whose features might have been quickly obliterated by decay), is allowed to lie conspicuously in the scene of the outrage—I allude to the handkerchief with the *name* of the deceased. If this was accident, it was not the accident *of a gang*. We can imagine it only the accident of an individual. Let us see. An individual has committed the murder. He is alone with the ghost of the departed. He is appalled by what lies motionless before him. The fury of his passion is over, and there is abundant room in his heart for the natural awe of the deed. His is none of that confidence which the presence of numbers inevitably inspires. He is *alone* with the dead. He trembles and is bewildered. Yet there is a necessity for disposing of the corpse. He bears it to the river, and leaves behind him the other evidences of his guilt; for it is difficult, if not impossible, to carry all the burthen at once, and it will be easy to return for what is left. But in his toilsome journey to the water his fears redouble within him. The sounds of life encompass his path. A dozen times he hears or fancies he hears the step of an observer. Even the very lights from the city bewilder him. Yet, in time, and by long and frequent pauses of deep agony, he reaches the river's brink, and disposes of his ghastly charge—perhaps through the medium of a boat. But *now* what treasure does the world hold—what threat of vengeance could it hold out—which would have power to urge the return of that lonely murderer over that toilsome and perilous path, to the thicket and its blood-chilling recollections? He returns *not*, let the consequences be what they may. He *could* not return if he would. His sole thought is immediate escape. He turns his back *for ever* upon those dreadful shrubberies, and flees as from the wrath to come.

"But how with a gang? Their number would have inspired them with confidence; if, indeed, confidence is ever wanting in the breast of the arrant blackguard; and of arrant blackguards alone are the supposed *gangs* ever constituted. Their number, I say, would have prevented the bewildering and unreasoning terror which I have imagined to paralyse the single man. Could we suppose an oversight in one, or two, or three, this oversight would have been remedied by a fourth. They would have left nothing behind them; for their number would have enabled them to carry *all* at once. There would have been no need of *return*.

"Consider now the circumstance that, in the outer garment of the corpse when found, 'a slip, about a foot wide, had been torn upward from the bottom hem to the waist, wound three times round the waist, and secured by a sort

of hitch in the back.' This was done with the obvious design of affording *a handle* by which to carry the body. But would any *number* of men have dreamed of resorting to such an expedient? To three or four, the limbs of the corpse would have afforded not only a sufficient but the best possible hold. The device is that of a single individual; and this brings us to the fact that 'between the thicket and the river the rails of the fences were found taken down, and the ground bore evident traces of some heavy burden having been dragged along it!' But would a *number* of men have put themselves to the superfluous trouble of taking down a fence, for the purpose of dragging through it a corpse which they might have *lifted over* any fence in an instant? Would a *number* of men have so *dragged* a corpse at all as to have left evident *traces* of the dragging?

"And here we must refer to an observation of *Le Commerciel;* an observation upon which I have already, in some measure, commented. 'A piece,' says this journal, 'of one of the unfortunate girl's petticoats was torn out and tied under her chin, and around the back of her head, probably to prevent screams. This was done by fellows who had no pocket-handkerchiefs.'

"I have before suggested that a genuine blackguard is never *without* a pocket-handkerchief. But it is not to this fact that I now specially advert. That it was not through want of a handkerchief for the purpose imagined by *Le Commerciel,* that this bandage was employed, is rendered apparent by the handkerchief left in the thicket; and that the object was not 'to prevent screams' appears also, from the bandage having been employed in preference to what would so much better have answered the purpose. But the language of the evidence speaks of the strip in question as 'found around the neck, fitting loosely, and secured with a hard knot.' These words are sufficiently vague, but differ materially from those of *Le Commerciel.* The slip was eighteen inches wide, and therefore, although of muslin, would form a strong band when folded or rumpled longitudinally. And thus rumpled it was discovered. My inference is this: The solitary murderer, having borne the corpse for some distance (whether from the thicket or elsewhere) by means of the bandage *hitched* around its middle, found the weight, in this mode of procedure, too much for his strength. He resolved to drag the burthen—the evidence goes to show that it *was* dragged. With this object in view, it became necessary to attach something like a rope to one of the extremities. It could be best attached about the neck, where the head would prevent its slipping off. And now the murderer bethought him, unquestionably, of the bandage about the loins. He would have used this, but for its volution about the corpse, the *hitch* which embarrassed it, and the reflection that it had not been 'torn off' from the garment. It was easier to tear a new slip from the petticoat. He tore it, made it fast about the neck, and so *dragged* his victim to the brink of the river. That this 'bandage,' only attainable with trouble and delay, and but imperfectly answering its purpose—that this bandage was employed *at all,* demonstrates that the necessity for its employment sprang from circumstances arising at a period when the handkerchief was no longer attainable—that is to say, arising, as we have imagined, after quitting the thicket (if the thicket it was), and on the road between the thicket and the river.

"But the evidence, you will say, of Madame Deluc (!) points especially to the presence of *a gang* in the vicinity of the thicket, at or about the epoch of the murder. This I grant. I doubt if there were not a *dozen* gangs, such as described by Madame Deluc, in and about the vicinity of the Barrière du Roule at *or about* the period of this tragedy. But the gang which has drawn upon itself the pointed animadversion, although the somewhat tardy and very suspicious evidence of Madame Deluc, is the *only* gang which is represented by that honest and scrupulous old lady as having eaten her cakes, and swallowed her brandy, without putting themselves to the trouble of making her payment. *Et hinc illæ iræ?*

"But what *is* the precise evidence of Madame Deluc? 'A gang of miscreants made their appearance, behaved boisterously, ate and drank without making payment, followed in the route of the young man and the girl, returned to the inn *about dusk*, and recrossed the river as if in great haste.'

"Now, this 'great haste' very possibly seemed *greater* haste in the eyes of Madame Deluc, since she dwelt lingeringly and lamentingly upon her violated cakes and ale—cakes and ale for which she might still have entertained a faint hope of compensation. Why, otherwise, since it was *about dusk*, should she make a point of the *haste?* It is no cause for wonder, surely, that a gang of blackguards should make *haste* to get home when a wide river is to be crossed in small boats, when storm impends, and when night *approaches.*

"I say *approaches;* for the night had *not yet arrived.* It was only *about dusk* that the indecent haste of these 'miscreants' offended the sober eyes of Madame Deluc. But we are told that it was upon this very evening that Madame Deluc, as well as her eldest son, 'heard the screams of a female in the vicinity of the inn.' And in what words does Madame Deluc designate the period of the evening at which these screams were heard? 'It was *soon after dark,*' she says. But 'soon after dark' is at least *dark;* and '*about dusk*' is as certainly daylight. Thus it is abundantly clear that the gang quitted the Barrière du Roule *prior* to the screams overheard (?) by Madame Deluc. And although, in all the many reports of the evidence, the relative expressions in question are distinctly and invariably employed just as I have employed them in this conversation with yourself, no notice whatever of the gross discrepancy has, as yet, been taken by any of the public journals, or by any of the myrmidons of police.

"I shall add but one to the arguments against *a gang;* but this *one* has, to my own understanding at least, a weight altogether irresistible. Under the circumstances of large reward offered, and full pardon to any king's evidence, it is not to be imagined, for a moment, that some member of *a gang* of low ruffians, or of any body of men, would not long ago have betrayed his accomplices. Each one of a gang, so placed, is not so much greedy of reward, or anxious for escape, as *fearful of betrayal.* He betrays eagerly and early that *he may not himself be betrayed.* That the secret has not been divulged is the very best of proof that it is, in fact, a secret. The horrors of this dark deed are known only to *one,* or two, living human beings, and to God.

"Let us sum up now the meagre yet certain fruits of our long analysis. We

have attained the idea either of a fatal accident under the roof of Madame Deluc, or of a murder perpetrated in the thicket at the Barrière du Roule, by a lover, or at least by an intimate and secret associate of the deceased. The associate is of swarthy complexion. This complexion, the 'hitch' in the bandage, and the 'sailor's knot' with which the bonnet-ribbon is tied, point to a seaman. His companionship with the deceased—a gay but not abject young girl—designates him as above the grade of the common sailor. Here the well-written and urgent communications to the journals are much in the way of corroboration. The circumstance of the first elopement, as mentioned by *Le Mercure*, tends to blend the idea of this seaman with that of the 'naval officer' who is first known to have led the unfortunate into crime.

"And here, most fitly, comes the consideration of the continued absence of him of the dark complexion. Let me pause to observe that the complexion of this man is dark and swarthy; it was no common swarthiness which constituted the *sole* point of resemblance, both as regards Valence and Madame Deluc. But why is this man absent? Was he murdered by the gang? If so, why are there only *traces* of the assassinated *girl*? The scene of the two outrages will naturally be supposed identical. And where is his corpse? The assassins would most probably have disposed of both in the same way. But it may be said that this man lives, and is deterred from making himself known through dread of being charged with the murder. This consideration might be supposed to operate upon him now—at this late period—since it has been given in evidence that he was seen with Marie, but it would have had no force at the period of the deed. The first impulse of an innocent man would have been to announce the outrage, and to aid in identifying the ruffians. This *policy* would have suggested. He had been seen with the girl. He had crossed the river with her in an open ferry-boat. The denouncing of the assassins would have appeared, even to an idiot, the surest and sole means of relieving himself from suspicion. We cannot suppose him, on the night of the fatal Sunday, both innocent himself and incognisant of an outrage committed. Yet only under such circumstances is it possible to imagine that he would have failed, if alive, in the denouncement of the assassins.

"And what means are ours of attaining the truth? We shall find these means of multiplying and gathering distinctness as we proceed. Let us sift to the bottom this affair of the first elopement. Let us know the full history of 'the officer,' with his present circumstances, and his whereabouts at the precise period of the murder. Let us carefully compare with each other the various communications sent to the evening paper, in which the object was to inculpate a *gang*. This done, let us compare these communications, both as regards style and MS., with those sent to the morning paper, at a previous period, and insisting so vehemently upon the guilt of Mennais. And, all this done, let us again compare these various communications with the known MSS. of the officer. Let us endeavour to ascertain, by repeated questionings of Madame Deluc and her boys, as well as of the omnibus-driver, Valence, something more of the personal appearance and bearing of the 'man of dark complexion.' Queries, skilfully directed, will not fail to elicit, from some of these parties, information on this particular point

(or upon others)—information which the parties themselves may not even be aware of possessing. And let us now trace *the boat* picked up by the bargeman on the morning of Monday the twenty-third of June, and which was removed from the barge-office, without the cognisance of the officer in attendance, and *without the rudder*, at some period prior to the discovery of the corpse. With a proper caution and perseverance we shall infallibly trace this boat; for not only can the bargeman who picked it up identify it, but the *rudder is at hand*. The rudder *of a sail boat* would not have been abandoned without enquiry, by one altogether at ease in heart. And here let me pause to insinuate a question. There was no *advertisement* of the picking up of this boat. It was silently taken to the barge-office, and as silently removed. But its owner or employer—how *happened* he, at so early a period on Tuesday morning, to be informed, without the agency of advertisement, of the locality of the boat taken up on Monday, unless we imagine some connection with the *navy*—some personal permanent connection leading to cognisance of its minute interests—its petty local news?

"In speaking of the lonely assassin dragging his burden to the shore, I have already suggested the probability of his availing himself *of a boat*. Now we are to understand that Marie Rogêt *was* precipitated from a boat. This would naturally have been the case. The corpse could not have been trusted to the shallow waters of the shore. The peculiar marks on the back and shoulders of the victim tell of the bottom ribs of a boat. That the body was found without weight is also corroborative of the idea. If thrown from the shore a weight would have been attached. We can only account for its absence by supposing the murderer to have neglected the precaution of supplying himself with it before pushing off. In the act of consigning the corpse to the water he would unquestionably have noticed his oversight; but then no remedy would have been at hand. Any risk would have been preferred to a return to that accursed shore. Having rid himself of his ghastly charge, the murderer would have hastened to the city. There, at some obscure wharf, he would have leaped on land. But the boat, would he have secured it? He would have been in too great haste for such things as securing a boat. Moreover, in fastening it to the wharf, he would have felt as if securing evidence against himself. His natural thought would have been to cast from him, as far as possible, all that held connection with his crime. He would not only have fled from the wharf, but he would not have permitted the *boat* to remain. Assuredly he would have cast it adrift. Let us pursue our fancies. —In the morning, the wretch is stricken with unutterable horror at finding that the boat has been picked up and detained at a locality which he is in the daily habit of frequenting—at a locality, perhaps, which his duty compels him to frequent. The next night, *without daring to ask for the rudder*, he removes it. Now *where* is that rudderless boat? Let it be one of our first purposes to discover. With the first glimpse we obtain of it, the dawn of our success shall begin. This boat shall guide us, with a rapidity which will surprise even ourselves, to him who employed it in the midnight of the fatal Sabbath. Corroboration will rise upon corroboration, and the murderer will be traced."

[For reasons which we shall not specify, but which to many readers will

appear obvious, we have taken the liberty of here omitting, from the MSS. placed in our hands, such portion as details the *following up* of the apparently slight clue obtained by Dupin. We feel it advisable only to state, in brief, that the result desired was brought to pass; and that the Prefect fulfilled punctually, although with reluctance, the terms of his compact with the Chevalier. Mr. Poe's article concludes with the following words.—*Eds.*[23]]

It will be understood that I speak of coincidences and *no more*. What I have said above upon this topic must suffice. In my own heart there dwells no faith in præter-nature. That Nature and its God are two, no man who thinks will deny. That the latter, creating the former, can, at will, control or modify it, is also unquestionable. I say "at will"; for the question is of will, and not, as the insanity of logic has assumed, of power. It is not that the Deity *cannot* modify His laws, but that we insult Him in imagining a possible necessity for modification. In their origin these laws were fashioned to embrace *all* contingencies which *could* lie in the Future. With God all is *Now*.

I repeat, then, that I speak of these things only as of coincidences. And further: in what I relate it will be seen that between the fate of the unhappy Mary Cecilia Rogers, so far as that fate is known, and the fate of one Marie Rogêt, up to a certain epoch in her history, there has existed a parallel in the contemplation of whose wonderful exactitude the reason becomes embarrassed. I say all this will be seen. But let it not for a moment be supposed that, in proceeding with the sad narrative of Marie from the epoch just mentioned, and in tracing to its *dénouement* the mystery which enshrouded her, it is my covert design to hint at an extension of the parallel, or even to suggest that the measures adopted in Paris for the discovery of the assassin of a *grisette*, or measures founded in any similar ratiocination, would produce any similar result.

For, in respect to the latter branch of the supposition, it should be considered that the most trifling variation in the facts of the two cases might give rise to the most important miscalculations, by diverting thoroughly the two courses of events; very much as, in arithmetic, an error which, in its own individuality, may be inappreciable, produces at length, by dint of multiplication at all points of the process, a result enormously at variance with truth. And, in regard to the former branch, we must not fail to hold in view that the very Calculus of Probabilities to which I have referred, forbids all idea of the extension of the parallel —forbids it with a positiveness strong and decided just in proportion as this parallel has been already long-drawn and exact. This is one of those anomalous propositions which, seemingly, appealing to thought altogether apart from the mathematical, is yet one which only the mathematician can fully entertain. Nothing, for example, is more difficult than to convince the merely general reader that the fact of sixes having been thrown twice in succession by a player at dice, is sufficient cause for betting the largest odds that sixes will not be thrown in the third attempt. A suggestion to this effect is usually rejected by the intellect at once. It does not appear that the two throws which have been com-

[23] Of *Snowden's Lady's Companion*.

pleted, and which lie now absolutely in the Past, can have influence upon the throw which exists only in the Future. The chance for throwing sixes seems to be precisely as it was at any ordinary time—that is to say, subject only to the influence of the various other throws which may be made by the dice. And this is a reflection which appears so exceedingly obvious that attempts to controvert it are received more frequently with a derisive smile than with anything like respectful attention. The error here involved—a gross error redolent of mischief —I cannot pretend to expose within the limits assigned me at present; and with the philosophical it needs no exposure. It may be sufficient here to say that it forms one of an infinite series of mistakes which arise in the path of Reason through her propensity for seeking truth *in detail*.

Sir Arthur Conan Doyle

THE ADVENTURE OF THE PRIORY SCHOOL

from The Return of Sherlock Holmes

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We have had some dramatic entrances and exits upon our small stage at Baker Street, but I cannot recollect anything more sudden and startling than the first appearance of Dr. Thorneycroft Huxtable, M.A., Ph.D., etc. His card, which seemed too small to carry the weight of his academic distinctions, preceded him by a few seconds, and then he entered himself—so large, so pompous, and so dignified that he was the very embodiment of self-possession and solidity. And yet his first action when the door had closed behind him was to stagger against the table, whence he slipped down upon the floor, and there was that majestic figure prostrate and insensible upon our bearskin hearthrug.

We had sprung to our feet, and for a few moments we stared in silent amazement at this ponderous piece of wreckage, which told of some sudden and fatal storm far out on the ocean of life. Then Holmes hurried with a cushion for his head, and I with brandy for his lips. The heavy white face was seamed with lines of trouble, the hanging pouches under the closed eyes were leaden in colour, the loose mouth drooped dolorously at the corners, the rolling chins were unshaven. Collar and shirt bore the grime of a long journey, and the hair bristled unkempt from the well-shaped head. It was a sorely stricken man who lay before us.

"What is it, Watson?" asked Holmes.

"Absolute exhaustion—possibly mere hunger and fatigue," said I, with my

finger on the thready pulse, where the stream of life trickled thin and small.

"Return ticket from Mackleton, in the North of England," said Holmes, drawing it from the watch-pocket.

"It is not twelve o'clock yet. He has certainly been an early starter."

The puckered eyelids had begun to quiver, and now a pair of vacant grey eyes looked up at us. An instant later the man had scrambled on to his feet, his face crimson with shame.

"Forgive this weakness, Mr. Holmes; I have been a little overwrought. Thank you, if I might have a glass of milk and a biscuit I have no doubt that I should be better. I came personally, Mr. Holmes, in order to ensure that you would return with me. I feared that no telegram would convince you of the absolute urgency of the case."

"When you are quite restored—"

"I am quite well again. I cannot imagine how I came to be so weak. I wish you, Mr. Holmes, to come to Mackleton with me by the next train."

My friend shook his head.

"My colleague, Dr. Watson, could tell you that we are very busy at present. I am retained in this case of the Ferrers Documents, and the Abergavenny murder is coming up for trial. Only a very important issue could call me from London at present."

"Important!" Our visitor threw up his hands. "Have you heard nothing of the abduction of the only son of the Duke of Holdernesse?"

"What! the late Cabinet Minister?"

"Exactly. We had tried to keep it out of the papers, but there was some rumour in the *Globe* last night. I thought it might have reached your ears."

Holmes shot out his long thin arm and picked out Volume "H" in his encyclopædia of reference.

"'Holdernesse, sixth Duke, K.G., P.C.'—half the alphabet! 'Baron Beverley, Earl of Carston'—dear me, what a list! 'Lord-Lieutenant of Hallamshire since 1900. Married Edith, daughter of Sir Charles Appledore, 1888. Heir and only child, Lord Saltire. Owns about two hundred and fifty thousand acres. Minerals in Lancashire and Wales. Address: Carlton House Terrace; Holdernesse Hall, Hallamshire; Carston Castle, Bangor, Wales. Lord of the Admiralty, 1872; Chief Secretary of State for—' Well, well, this man is certainly one of the greatest subjects of the Crown!"

"The greatest and perhaps the wealthiest. I am aware, Mr. Holmes, that you take a very high line in professional matters, and that you are prepared to work for the work's sake. I may tell you, however, that his Grace has already intimated that a cheque for five thousand pounds will be handed over to the person who can tell him where his son is, and another thousand to him who can name the man, or men, who have taken him."

"It is a princely offer," said Holmes. "Watson, I think that we shall accompany Dr. Huxtable back to the North of England. And now, Dr. Huxtable, when you have consumed that milk you will kindly tell me what has happened, when it happened, how it happened, and, finally, what Dr. Thorneycroft Huxtable, of

the Priory School, near Mackleton, has to do with the matter, and why he comes three days after an event—the state of your chin gives the date—to ask for my humble services."

Our visitor had consumed his milk and biscuits. The light had come back to his eyes and the colour to his cheeks as he set himself with great vigour and lucidity to explain the situation.

"I must inform you, gentlemen, that the Priory is a preparatory school, of which I am the founder and principal. *Huxtable's Sidelights on Horace* may possibly recall my name to your memories. The Priory is, without exception, the best and most select preparatory school in England. Lord Leverstoke, the Earl of Blackwater, Sir Cathcart Soames—they all have entrusted their sons to me. But I felt that my school had reached its zenith when, three weeks ago, the Duke of Holdernesse sent Mr. James Wilder, his secretary, with the intimation that young Lord Saltire, ten years old, his only son and heir, was about to be committed to my charge. Little did I think that this would be the prelude to the most crushing misfortune of my life.

"On May 1st the boy arrived, that being the beginning of the summer term. He was a charming youth, and he soon fell into our ways. I may tell you—I trust that I am not indiscreet; half-confidences are absurd in such a case—that he was not entirely happy at home. It is an open secret that the duke's married life had not been a peaceful one, and the matter had ended in a separation by mutual consent, the duchess taking up her residence in the South of France. This had occurred very shortly before, and the boy's sympathies are known to have been strongly with his mother. He moped after her departure from Holdernesse Hall, and it was for this reason that the duke desired to send him to my establishment. In a fortnight the boy was quite at home with us, and was apparently absolutely happy.

"He was last seen on the night of May 13th—that is, the night of last Monday. His room was on the second floor, and was approached through another larger room in which two boys were sleeping. These boys saw and heard nothing, so that it is certain that young Saltire did not pass out that way. His window was open, and there is a stout ivy plant leading to the ground. We could trace no footmarks below, but it is sure that this is the only possible exit.

"His absence was discovered at seven o'clock on Tuesday morning. His bed had been slept in. He had dressed himself fully before going off in his usual school suit of black Eton jacket and dark grey trousers. There were no signs that any one had entered the room, and it is quite certain that anything in the nature of cries or a struggle would have been heard, since Caunter, the elder boy in the inner room, is a very light sleeper.

"When Lord Saltire's disappearance was discovered I at once called a roll of the whole establishment—boys, masters, and servants. It was then that we ascertained that Lord Saltire had not been alone in his flight. Heidegger, the German master, was missing. His room was on the second floor, at the farther end of the building, facing the same way as Lord Saltire's. His bed had also been slept in; but he had apparently gone away partly dressed, since his shirt and socks were

lying on the floor. He had undoubtedly let himself down by the ivy, for we could see the marks of his feet where he had landed on the lawn. His bicycle was kept in a small shed beside this lawn, and it also was gone.

"He had been with me for two years, and came with the best references; but he was a silent, morose man, not very popular either with masters or boys. No trace could be found of the fugitives, and now on Thursday morning we are as ignorant as we were on Tuesday. Enquiry was, of course, made at once at Holdernesse Hall. It is only a few miles away, and we imagined that in some sudden attack of home-sickness he had gone back to his father; but nothing had been heard of him. The duke is greatly agitated—and as to me, you have seen yourselves the state of nervous prostration to which the suspense and the responsibility have reduced me. Mr. Holmes, if ever you put forward your full powers, I implore you to do so now, for never in your life could you have a case which is more worthy of them."

Sherlock Holmes had listened with the utmost intentness to the statement of the unhappy schoolmaster. His drawn brows and the deep furrow between them showed that he needed no exhortation to concentrate all his attention upon a problem which, apart from the tremendous interests involved, must appeal so directly to his love of the complex and the unusual. He now drew out his notebook and jotted down one or two memoranda.

"You have been very remiss in not coming to me sooner," said he severely. "You start me on my investigation with a very serious handicap. It is inconceivable, for example, that this ivy and this lawn would have yielded nothing to an expert observer."

"I am not to blame, Mr. Holmes. His Grace was extremely desirous to avoid all public scandal. He was afraid of his family unhappiness being dragged before the world. He has a deep horror of anything of the kind."

"But there has been some official investigation?"

"Yes, sir, and it has proved most disappointing. An apparent clue was at once obtained, since a boy and a young man were reported to have been seen leaving a neighbouring station by an early train. Only last night we had news that the couple had been hunted down in Liverpool, and they prove to have no connection whatever with the matter in hand. Then it was that in my despair and disappointment, after a sleepless night, I came straight to you by the early train."

"I suppose the local investigation was relaxed while this false clue was being followed up?"

"It was entirely dropped."

"So that three days have been wasted. The affair has been most deplorably handled."

"I feel it, and admit it."

"And yet the problem should be capable of ultimate solution. I shall be very happy to look into it. Have you been able to trace any connection between the missing boy and this German master?"

"None at all."

"Was he in the master's class?"

"No; he never exchanged a word with him, so far as I know."

"That is certainly very singular. Had the boy a bicycle?"

"No."

"Was any other bicycle misssing?"

"No."

"Is that certain?"

"Quite."

"Well, now, you do not mean to seriously suggest that this German rode off upon a bicycle in the dead of night bearing the boy in his arms?"

"Certainly not."

"Then what is the theory in your mind?"

"The bicycle may have been a blind. It may have been hidden somewhere, and the pair gone off on foot."

"Quite so; but it seems rather an absurd blind, does it not? Were there other bicycles in this shed?"

"Several."

"Would he not have hidden a *couple* had he desired to give the idea that they had gone off upon them?"

"I suppose he would."

"Of course he would. The blind theory won't do. But the incident is an admirable starting-point for an investigation. After all, a bicycle is not an easy thing to conceal or to destroy. One other question. Did any one call to see the boy on the day before he disappeared?"

"No."

"Did he get any letters?"

"Yes; one letter."

"From whom?"

"From his father."

"Do you open the boys' letters?"

"No."

"How do you know it was from the father?"

"The coat of arms was on the envelope, and it was addressed in the duke's peculiar stiff hand. Besides, the duke remembers having written."

"When had he a letter before that?"

"Not for several days."

"Had he ever one from France?"

"No; never."

"You see the point of my questions, of course. Either the boy was carried off by force or he went of his own free will. In the latter case you would expect that some prompting from outside would be needed to make so young a lad do such a thing. If he has had no visitors, that prompting must have come in letters. Hence I try to find out who were his correspondents."

"I fear I cannot help you much. His only correspondent, so far as I know, was his own father."

"Who wrote to him on the very day of his disappearance. Were the relations between father and son very friendly?"

"His Grace is never very friendly with any one. He is completely immersed in large public questions, and is rather inaccessible to all ordinary emotions. But he was always kind to the boy in his own way."

"But the sympathies of the latter were with the mother?"

"Yes."

"Did he say so?"

"No."

"The duke, then?"

"Good heavens, no!"

"Then how could you know?"

"I have had some confidential talk with Mr. James Wilder, his Grace's secretary. It was he who gave me the information about Lord Saltire's feelings."

"I see. By the way, that last letter of the duke's—was it found in the boy's room after he was gone?"

"No; he had taken it with him. I think, Mr. Holmes, it is time that we were leaving for Euston."

"I will order a four-wheeler. In a quarter of an hour we shall be at your service. If you are telegraphing home, Mr. Huxtable, it would be well to allow the people in your neighbourhood to imagine that the enquiry is still going on in Liverpool, or wherever else that red herring led your pack. In the meantime I will do a little quiet work at your own doors, and perhaps the scent is not so cold but that two old hounds like Watson and myself may get a sniff of it."

That evening found us in the cold, bracing atmosphere of the Peak country, in which Dr. Huxtable's famous school is situated. It was already dark when we reached it. A card was lying on the hall table, and the butler whispered something to his master, who turned to us with agitation in every heavy feature.

"The duke is here," said he. "The duke and Mr. Wilder are in the study. Come, gentlemen, and I will introduce you."

I was, of course, familiar with the pictures of the famous statesman, but the man himself was very different from his representation. He was a tall and stately person, scrupulously dressed, with a drawn, thin face, and a nose which was grotesquely curved and long. His complexion was of a dead pallor, which was more startling by contrast with a long, dwindling beard of vivid red, which flowed down over his white waistcoat, with his watch-chain gleaming through its fringe. Such was the stately presence who looked stonily at us from the centre of Dr. Huxtable's hearthrug. Beside him stood a very young man, whom I understood to be Wilder, the private secretary. He was small, nervous, alert, with intelligent, light blue eyes and mobile features. It was he who at once, in an incisive and positive tone, opened the conversation.

"I called this morning, Dr. Huxtable, too late to prevent you from starting for London. I learned that your object was to invite Mr. Sherlock Holmes to

undertake the conduct of this case. His Grace is surprised, Dr. Huxtable, that you should have taken such a step without consulting him."

"When I learned the police had failed—"

"His Grace is by no means convinced that the police have failed."

"But surely, Mr. Wilder—"

"You are well aware, Dr. Huxtable, that his Grace is particularly anxious to avoid all public scandal. He prefers to take as few people as possible into his confidence."

"The matter can be easily remedied," said the browbeaten doctor. "Mr. Sherlock Holmes can return to London by the morning train."

"Hardly that, doctor, hardly that," said Holmes, in his blandest voice. "This northern air is invigorating and pleasant, so I propose to spend a few days upon your moors, and to occupy my mind as best I may. Whether I have the shelter of your roof or of the village inn is, of course, for you to decide."

I could see that the unfortunate doctor was in the last stage of indecision, from which he was rescued by the deep, sonorous voice of the red-bearded duke, which boomed out like a dinner-gong.

"I agree with Mr. Wilder, Dr. Huxtable, that you would have done wisely to consult me. But since Mr. Holmes has already been taken into your confidence, it would indeed be asbsurd that we should not avail ourselves of his services. Far from going to the inn, Mr. Holmes, I should be pleased if you would come and stay with me at Holdernesse Hall!"

"I thank your Grace. For the purposes of my investigation I think that it would be wiser for me to remain at the scene of the mystery."

"Just as you like, Mr. Holmes. Any information which Mr. Wilder or I can give you is, of course, at your disposal."

"It will probably be necessary for me to see you at the Hall," said Holmes. "I would only ask you now, sir, whether you have formed any explanation in your own mind as to the mysterious disappearance of your son?"

"No, sir, I have not."

"Excuse me if I allude to that which is painful to you, but I have no alternative. Do you think that the duchess had anything to do with the matter?"

The great minister showed perceptible hesitation.

"I do not think so," he said at last.

"The other most obvious explanation is that the child has been kidnapped for the purpose of levying ransom. You have not had any demand of the sort?"

"No, sir."

"One more question, your Grace. I understand that you wrote to your son upon the day when this incident occurred."

"No; I wrote upon the day before."

"Exactly. But he received it on that day?"

"Yes."

"Was there anything in your letter which might have unbalanced him or induced him to take such a step?"

"No, sir, certainly not."

"Did you post that letter yourself?"

The nobleman's reply was interrupted by his secretary, who broke in with some heat.

"His Grace is not in the habit of posting letters himself," said he. "This letter was laid with others upon the study table, and I myself put them in the post-bag."

"You are sure this one was among them?"

"Yes; I observed it."

"How many letters did your Grace write that day?"

"Twenty or thirty. I have a large correspondence. But surely this is somewhat irrelevant?"

"Not entirely," said Holmes.

"For my own part," the duke continued, "I have advised the police to turn their attention to the South of France. I have already said that I do not believe that the duchess would encourage so monstrous an action, but the lad had the most wrong-headed opinions, and it is possible that he may have fled to her, aided and abetted by this German. I think, Dr. Huxtable, that we will now return to the Hall."

I could see that there were other questions which Holmes would have wished to put; but the nobleman's abrupt manner showed that the interview was at an end. It was evident that to his intensely aristocratic nature this discussion of his intimate family affairs with a stranger was most abhorrent, and that he feared lest every fresh question would throw a fiercer light into the discreetly shadowed corners of his ducal history.

When the nobleman and his secretary had left, my friend flung himself at once with characteristic eagerness into the investigation.

The boy's chamber was carefully examined, and yielded nothing save the absolute conviction that it was only through the window that he could have escaped. The German master's room and effects gave no further clue. In his case a trailer of ivy had given way under his weight, and we saw by the light of a lantern the mark on the lawn where his heels had come down. That one dent in the short green grass was the only material witness left of this inexplicable nocturnal flight.

Sherlock Holmes left the house alone, and only returned after eleven. He had obtained a large ordnance map of the neighbourhood, and this he brought into my room, where he laid it out on the bed, and, having balanced the lamp in the middle of it, he began to smoke over it, and occasionally to point out objects of interest with the reeking amber of his pipe.

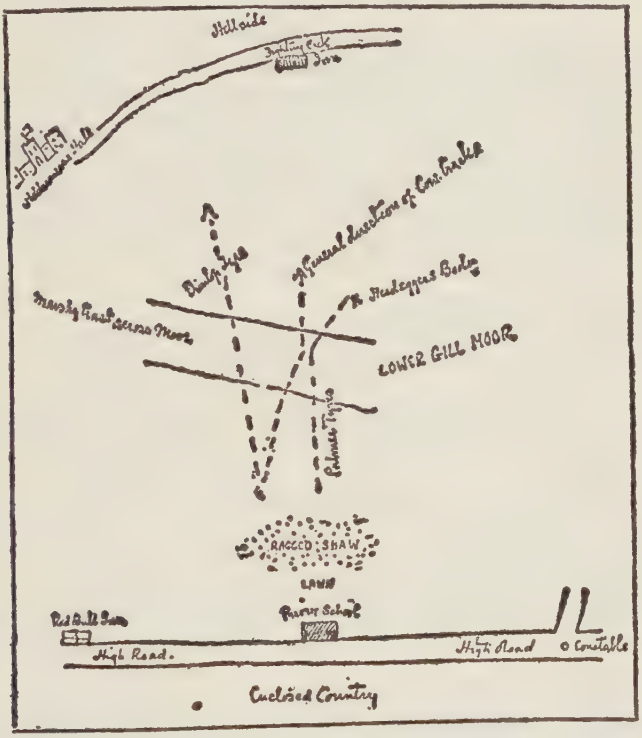
"This case grows upon me, Watson," said he. "There are decidedly some points of interest in connection with it. In this early stage I want you to realise these geographical features, which may have a good deal to do with our investigation.

"Look at this map. This dark square is the Priory School. I'll put a pin in it. Now, this line is the main road. You see that it runs east and west past the

school, and you see also there is no side road for a mile either way. If these two folk passed away by road it was *this* road."

"Exactly."

"By a singular and happy chance we are able to some extent to check what passed along this road during the night in question. At this point, where my pipe is now resting, a country constable was on duty from twelve to six. It is, as you perceive, the first cross road on the east side. This man declares that he was



SKETCH MAP SHOWING THE LOCALITY

not absent from his post for an instant, and he is positive that neither boy nor man could have gone that way unseen. I have spoken with this policeman to-night, and he appears to me to be a perfectly reliable person. That blocks this end. We have now to deal with the other. There is an inn here, the 'Red Bull,' the landlady of which was ill. She had sent to Mackleton for a doctor, but he did not arrive until morning, being absent at another case. The people at the inn were alert all night, awaiting his coming, and one or other of them seems to have continually had an eye upon the road. They declare that no one passed. If their evidence is good, then we are fortunate enough to be able to block the

west, and also to be able to say that the fugitives did *not* use the road at all."

"But the bicycle?" I objected.

"Quite so. We will come to the bicycle presently. To continue our reasoning: if these people did not go by the road, they must have traversed the country to the north of the house or to the south of the house. That is certain. Let us weigh the one against the other. On the south of the house is, as you perceive, a large district of arable land, cut up into small fields, with stone walls between them. There, I admit that a bicycle is impossible. We can dismiss the idea. We turn to the country on the north. Here there lies a grove of trees, marked as the 'Ragged Shaw,' and on the farther side stretches a great rolling moor—Lower Gill Moor—extending for ten miles, and sloping gradually upwards. Here, at one side of this wilderness, is Holdernesse Hall, ten miles by road, but only six across the moor. It is a peculiarly desolate plain. A few moor farmers have small holdings, where they rear sheep and cattle. Except these, the plover and the curlew are the only inhabitants until you come to the Chesterfield high road. There is a church there, you see, a few cottages, and an inn. Beyond that the hills become precipitous. Surely it is here to the north that our quest must lie."

"But the bicycle?" I persisted.

"Well, well!" said Holmes impatiently. "A good cyclist does not need a high road. The moor is intersected with paths, and the moon was at the full. Halloa! What is this?"

There was an agitated knock at the door, and an instant afterwards Dr. Huxtable was in the room. In his hand he held a blue cricket-cap, with a white chevron on the peak.

"At last we have a clue!" he cried. "Thank Heaven, at last we are on the dear boy's track! It is his cap."

"Where was it found?"

"In the van of the gipsies who camped on the moor. They left on Tuesday. To-day the police traced them down and examined their caravan. This was found."

"How do they account for it?"

"They shuffled and lied—said that they found it on the moor on Tuesday morning. They know where he is, the rascals! Thank goodness, they are all safe under lock and key. Either the fear of the law or the duke's purse will certainly get out of them all that they know."

"So far, so good," said Holmes, when the doctor had at last left the room. "It at least bears out the theory that it is on the side of the Lower Gill Moor that we must hope for results. The police have really done nothing locally, save the arrest of these gipsies. Look here, Watson! There is a watercourse across the moor. You see it marked here in the map. In some parts it widens into a morass. This is particularly so in the region between Holdernesse Hall and the school. It is vain to look elsewhere for tracks in this dry weather; but at that point there is certainly a chance of some record being left. I will call you early to-morrow morning, and you and I will try if we can throw some light upon the mystery."

The day was just breaking when I woke to find the long, thin form of Holmes by my bedside. He was fully dressed, and had apparently already been out.

"I have done the lawn and the bicycle shed," said he. "I have also had a ramble through the Ragged Shaw. Now, Watson, there is cocoa ready in the next room. I must beg you to hurry, for we have a great day before us."

His eyes shone, and his cheek was flushed with the exhilaration of the master workman who sees his work lies ready before him. A very different Holmes, this active, alert man, from the introspective and pallid dreamer of Baker Street. I felt, as I looked upon that supple figure, alive with nervous energy, that it was indeed a strenuous day that awaited us.

And yet it opened in the blackest disappointment. With high hopes we struck across the peaty, russet moor, intersected with a thousand sheep-paths, until we came to the broad, light green belt which marked the morass between us and Holdernesse. Certainly, if the lad had gone homewards, he must have passed this, and he would not pass it without leaving his trace. But no sign of him or the German could be seen. With a darkening face my friend strode along the margin, eagerly observant of every muddy stain upon the mossy surface. Sheep-marks there were in profusion, and at one place some miles down, cows had left their tracks. Nothing more.

"Check number one," said Holmes, looking gloomily over the rolling expanse of the moor. "There is another morass down yonder, and a narrow neck between. Halloa! halloa! halloa! What have we here?"

We had come on a small black ribbon of pathway. In the middle of it, clearly marked on the sodden soil, was the track of a bicycle.

"Hurrah!" I cried. "We have it."

But Holmes was shaking his head, and his face was puzzled and expectant rather than joyous.

"A bicycle certainly, but not *the* bicycle," said he. "I am familiar with forty-two different impressions left by tyres. This, as you perceive, is a Dunlop, with a patch upon the outer cover. Heidegger's tyres were Palmers, leaving longitudinal stripes. Aveling, the mathematical master, was sure upon the point. Therefore it is not Heidegger's track."

"The boy's, then?"

"Possibly, if we could prove a bicycle to have been in his possession. But this we have utterly failed to do. This track, as you perceive, was made by a rider who was going from the direction of the school."

"Or towards it?"

"No, no, my dear Watson. The more deeply sunk impression is, of course, the hind wheel, upon which the weight rests. You perceive several places where it has passed across and obliterated the more shallow mark of the front one. It was undoubtedly heading away from the school. It may or may not be connected with our enquiry, but we will follow it backwards before we go any farther."

We did so, and at the end of a few hundred yards lost the tracks as we emerged from the boggy portion of the moor. Following the path backwards, we picked out another spot, where a spring trickled across it. Here, once again, was

the mark of the bicycle, though nearly obliterated by the hoofs of cows. After that there was no sign, but the path ran right on into Ragged Shaw, the wood which backed on to the school. From this wood the cycle must have emerged. Holmes sat down on a boulder and rested his chin in his hands. I had smoked two cigarettes before he moved.

"Well, well," said he at last. "It is, of course, possible that a cunning man might change the tyre of his bicycle in order to leave unfamiliar tracks. A criminal who was capable of such a thought is a man whom I should be proud to do business with. We will leave this question undecided and hark back to our morass again, for we have left a good deal unexplored."

We continued our systematic survey of the edge of the sodden portion of the moor, and soon our perseverance was gloriously rewarded.

Right across the lower part of the bog lay a miry path. Holmes gave a cry of delight as he approached it. An impression like a fine bundle of telegraph wires ran down the centre of it. It was the Palmer tyre.

"Here is Herr Heidegger, sure enough!" cried Holmes exultantly. "My reasoning seems to have been pretty sound, Watson."

"I congratulate you."

"But we have a long way still to go. Kindly walk clear of the path. Now let us follow the trail. I fear that it will not lead very far."

We found, however, as we advanced, that this portion of the moor is intersected with soft patches, and, though we frequently lost sight of the track, we always succeeded in picking it up once more.

"Do you observe," said Holmes, "that the rider is now undoubtedly forcing the pace? There can be no doubt of it. Look at this impression, where you get both tyres clear. The one is as deep as the other. That can only mean that the rider is throwing his weight on to the handle-bar as a man does when he is sprinting. By Jove! he has had a fall."

There was a broad, irregular smudge covering some yards of the track. Then there were a few foot-marks, and the tyre reappeared once more.

"A side-slip," I suggested.

Holmes held up a crumpled branch of flowering gorse. To my horror I perceived that the yellow blossoms were all dabbled with crimson. On the path, too, and among the heather were dark stains of clotted blood.

"Bad!" said Holmes. "Bad! Stand clear! Watson. Not an unnecessary footstep! What do I read here? He fell wounded, he stood up, he remounted, he proceeded. But there is no other track. Cattle on this side path. He was surely not gored by a bull? Impossible! But I see no traces of any one else. We must push on, Watson. Surely, with stains as well as the track to guide us, he cannot escape us now."

Our search was not a very long one. The tracks of the tyre began to curve fantastically upon the wet and shining path. Suddenly, as I looked ahead, the gleam of metal caught my eye from amid the thick gorse bushes. Out of them we dragged a bicycle, Palmer-tyred, one pedal bent, and the whole front of it horribly smeared and slobbered with blood. On the other side of the bushes a

shoe was projecting. We ran round, and there lay the unfortunate rider. He was a tall man, full bearded, with spectacles, one glass of which had been knocked out. The cause of his death was a frightful blow upon the head, which had crushed in part of his skull. That he could have gone on after receiving such an injury said much for the vitality and courage of the man. He wore shoes, but no socks, and his open coat disclosed a night-shirt beneath it. It was undoubtedly the German master.

Holmes turned the body over reverently, and examined it with great attention. He then sat in deep thought for a time, and I could see by his ruffled brow that this grim discovery had not, in his opinion, advanced us much in our inquiry.

"It is a little difficult to know what to do, Watson," said he, at last. "My own inclinations are to push this enquiry on, for we have already lost so much time that we cannot afford to waste another hour. On the other hand, we are bound to inform the police of this discovery, and to see that this poor fellow's body is looked after."

"I could take a note back."

"But I need your company and assistance. Wait a bit! There is a fellow cutting peat up yonder. Bring him over here, and he will guide the police."

I brought the peasant across, and Holmes dispatched the frightened man with a note to Dr. Huxtable.

"Now, Watson," said he, "we have picked up two clues this morning. One is the bicycle with the Palmer tyre, and we see what that has led to. The other is the bicycle with the patched Dunlop. Before we start to investigate that, let us try to realise what we *do* know, so as to make the most of it, and to separate the essential from the accidental.

"First of all, I wish to impress upon you that the boy certainly left of his own free will. He got down from his window and he went off, either alone or with some one. That is sure."

I assented.

"Well, now, let us turn to this unfortunate German master. The boy was fully dressed when he fled. Therefore he foresaw what he would do. But the German went without his socks. He certainly acted on very short notice."

"Undoubtedly."

"Why did he go? Because, from his bedroom window, he saw the flight of the boy. Because he wished to overtake him and bring him back. He seized his bicycle, pursued the lad, and in pursuing him met his death."

"So it would seem."

"Now I come to the critical part of my argument. The natural action of a man in pursuing a little boy would be to run after him. He would know that he could overtake him. But the German does not do so. He turns to his bicycle. I am told that he was an excellent cyclist. He would not do this if he did not see that the boy had some swift means of escape."

"The other bicycle."

"Let us continue our reconstruction. He meets his death five miles from the

school—not by a bullet, mark you, which even a lad might conceivably discharge, but by a savage blow dealt by a vigorous arm. The lad, then, *had* a companion in his flight. And the flight was a swift one, since it took five miles before an expert cyclist could overtake them. Yet we survey the ground round the scene of the tragedy. What do we find? A few cattle tracks, nothing more. I took a wide sweep round, and there is no path within fifty yards. Another cyclist could have had nothing to do with the actual murder. Nor were there any human footmarks."

"Holmes," I cried, "this is impossible."

"Admirable!" he said. "A most illuminating remark. It *is* impossible as I state it, and therefore I must in some respect have stated it wrong. Yet you saw for yourself. Can you suggest any fallacy?"

"He could not have fractured his skull in a fall?"

"In a morass, Watson?"

"I am at my wits' end."

"Tut, tut; we have solved some worse problems. At least we have plenty of material, if we can only use it. Come, then, and having exhausted the Palmer, let us see what the Dunlop with the patched cover has to offer us."

We picked up the track and followed it onwards for some distance; but soon the moor rose into a long, heather-tufted curve, and we left the watercourse behind us. No further help from tracks could be hoped for. At the spot where we saw the last of the Dunlop tyre it might equally have led to Holdernesse Hall, the stately towers of which rose some miles to our left, or to a low, grey village which lay in front of us, and marked the position of the Chesterfield high road.

As we approached the forbidding and squalid inn, with the sign of a game-cock above the door, Holmes gave a sudden groan and clutched me by the shoulder to save himself from falling. He had had one of those violent strains of the ankle which leave a man helpless. With difficulty he limped up to the door, where a squat, dark, elderly man was smoking a black clay pipe.

"How are you, Mr. Reuben Hayes?" said Holmes.

"Who are you, and how do you get my name so pat?" the countryman answered, with a suspicious flash of a pair of cunning eyes.

"Well, it's printed on the board above your head. It's easy to see a man who is master of his own house. I suppose you haven't such a thing as a carriage in your stables?"

"No; I have not."

"I can hardly put my foot to the ground."

"Don't put it to the ground."

"But I can't walk."

"Well, then, hop."

Mr. Reuben Hayes's manner was far from gracious, but Holmes took it with admirable good humour.

"Look here, my man," said he. "This is really rather an awkward fix for me. I don't mind how I get on."

"Neither do I," said the morose landlord.

"The matter is very important. I would offer you a sovereign for the use of a bicycle."

The landlord pricked up his ears.

"Where do you want to go?"

"To Holdernesse Hall."

"Pals of the dook, I suppose?" said the landlord, surveying our mud-stained garments with ironical eyes.

Holmes laughed good-naturedly.

"He'll be glad to see us, anyhow."

"Why?"

"Because we bring him news of his lost son."

The landlord gave a very visible start.

"What, you're on his track?"

"He has been heard of in Liverpool. They expect to get him every hour."

Again a swift change passed over the heavy, unshaven face. His manner was suddenly genial.

"I've less reason to wish the dook well than most men," said he, "for I was his head coachman once, and cruel bad he treated me. It was him that sacked me without a character on the word of a lying corn-chandler. But I'm glad to hear that the young lord was heard of in Liverpool, and I'll help you to take the news to the Hall."

"Thank you," said Holmes. "We'll have some food first. Then you can bring round the bicycle."

"I haven't got a bicycle."

Holmes held up a sovereign.

"I tell you man, that I haven't got one. I'll let you have two horses as far as the Hall."

"Well, well," said Holmes, "we'll talk about it when we've had something to eat."

When we were left alone in the stone-flagged kitchen it was astonishing how rapidly that sprained ankle recovered. It was nearly nightfall, and we had eaten nothing since early morning, so that we spent some time over our meal. Holmes was lost in thought, and once or twice he walked over to the window and stared earnestly out. It opened on to a squalid courtyard. In the far corner was a smithy, where a grimy lad was at work. On the other side were the stables. Holmes had sat down again after one of these excursions, when he suddenly sprang out of his chair with a loud exclamation.

"By Heaven, Watson, I believe that I've got it!" he cried. "Yes, yes, it must be so. Watson, do you remember seeing any cow-tracks to-day?"

"Yes, several."

"Where?"

"Well, everywhere. They were at the morass, and again on the path, and again near where poor Heidegger met his death."

"Exactly. Well, now, Watson, how many cows did you see on the moor?"

"I don't remember seeing any."

"Strange, Watson, that we should see tracks all along our line, but never a cow on the whole moor; very strange, Watson, eh?"

"Yes, it is strange."

"Now, Watson, make an effort; throw your mind back! Can you see those tracks upon the path?"

"Yes, I can."

"Can you recall that the tracks were sometimes like that, Watson"—he arranged a number of breadcrumbs in this fashion—: : : :—"and sometimes like this"—: · : · : ·—"and occasionally like this"—. · . · . ·

"Can you remember that?"

"No, I cannot."

"But I can. I could swear to it. However, we will go back at our leisure and verify it. What a blind beetle I have been not to draw my conclusion!"

"And what is your conclusion?"

"Only that it is a remarkable cow which walks, canters and gallops. By George, Watson, it was no brain of a country publican that thought out such a blind as that! The coast seems to be clear, save for that lad in the smithy. Let us slip out and see what we can see."

There were two rough-haired, unkempt horses in the tumble-down stable. Holmes raised the hind leg of one of them and laughed aloud.

"Old shoes, but newly shod—old shoes, but new nails. This case deserves to be a classic. Let us go across to the smithy."

The lad continued his work without regarding us. I saw Holmes's eye darting to right and left among the litter of iron and wood which was scattered about the floor. Suddenly, however, we heard a step behind us, and there was the landlord, his heavy eyebrows drawn down over his savage eyes, his swarthy features convulsed with passion.

He held a short metal-headed stick in his hand, and he advanced in so menacing a fashion that I was right glad to feel the revolver in my pocket.

"You infernal spies!" the man cried. "What are you doing there?"

"Why, Mr. Reuben Hayes," said Holmes coolly, "one might think that you were afraid of our finding something out."

The man mastered himself with a violent effort, and his grim mouth loosened into a false laugh, which was more menacing than his frown.

"You're welcome to all you can find out in my smithy," said he. "But look here, mister, I don't care for folk poking about my place without my leave, so the sooner you pay your score and get out of this the better I shall be pleased."

"All right, Mr. Hayes—no harm meant," said Holmes. "We have been having a look at your horses; but I think I'll walk after all. It's not far, I believe."

"Not more than two miles to the Hall gates. That's the road to the left." He watched us with sullen eyes until we had left his premises.

We did not go very far along the road, for Holmes stopped the instant that the curve hid us from the landlord's view.

"We were warm, as the children say, at that inn," said he. "I seem to grow

colder every step that I take away from it. No, no; I can't possibly leave it."

"I am convinced," said I, "that this Reuben Hayes knows all about it. A more self-evident villain I never saw."

"Oh! he impressed you in that way, did he? There are the horses, there is the smithy. Yes, it is an interesting place, this 'Fighting Cock.' I think we shall have another look at it in an unobtrusive way."

A long, sloping hillside, dotted with grey limestone boulders stretched behind us. We had turned off the road, and were making our way up the hill, when, looking in the direction of Holdernesse Hall, I saw a cyclist coming swiftly along.

"Get down, Watson!" cried Holmes, with a heavy hand upon my shouder. We had hardly sunk from view when the man flew past us on the road. Amid a rolling cloud of dust I caught a glimpse of a pale, agitated face—a face with horror in every lineament, the mouth open, the eyes staring wildly in front. It was like some strange caricature of the dapper James Wilder whom we had seen the night before.

"The duke's secretary!" cried Holmes. "Come, Watson, let us see what he does."

We scrambled from rock to rock until in a few moments we had made our way to a point from which we could see the front door of the inn. Wilder's bicycle was leaning against the wall beside it. No one was moving about the house, nor could we catch a glimpse of any faces at the windows. Slowly the twilight crept down as the sun sank behind the high towers of Holdernesse Hall. Then in the gloom we saw the two side-lamps of a trap light up in the stable-yard of the inn, and shortly afterwards heard the rattle of hoofs, as it wheeled out into the road and tore off at a furious pace in the direction of Chesterfield.

"What do you make of that, Watson?" Holmes whispered.

"It looks like a flight."

"A single man in a dog-cart, so far as I could see. Well, it certainly was not Mr. James Wilder, for there he is at the door."

A red square of light had sprung out of the darkness. In the middle of it was the black figure of the secretary, his head advanced, peering out into the night. It was evident that he was expecting some one. Then at last there were steps in the road, a second figure was visible for an instant against the light, the door shut, and all was black once more. Five minutes later a lamp was lit in a room upon the first floor.

"It seems to be a curious class of custom that is done by the 'Fighting Cock,'" said Holmes.

"The bar is on the other side."

"Quite so. These are what one may call the private guests. Now, what in the world is Mr. James Wilder doing in that den at this hour of night, and who is the companion who comes to meet him there? Come, Watson, we must really take a risk and try to investigate this a little more closely."

Together we stole down to the road and crept across to the door of the inn. The bicycle still leaned against the wall. Holmes struck a match and held it to

the back wheel, and I heard him chuckle as the light fell upon a patched Dunlop tyre. Up above us was the lighted window.

"I must have a peep through that, Watson. If you bend your back and support yourself upon the wall, I think that I can manage."

An instant later his feet were on my shoulders. But he was hardly up before he was down again.

"Come, my friend," said he, "our day's work has been quite long enough. I think that we have gathered all that we can. It's a long walk to the school, and the sooner we get started the better."

He hardly opened his lips during that weary trudge across the moor, nor would he enter the school when he reached it, but went on to Mackleton Station, whence he could send some telegrams. Late at night I heard him consoling Dr. Huxtable, prostrated by the tragedy of his master's death, and later still he entered my room as alert and vigorous as he had been when he started in the morning.

"All goes well, my friend," said he. "I promise that before tomorrow evening we shall have reached the solution of the mystery."

At eleven o'clock next morning my friend and I were walking up the famous yew avenue of Holdernesse Hall. We were ushered through the magnificent Elizabethan doorway and into his Grace's study. There we found Mr. James Wilder, demure and courtly, but with some trace of that wild terror of the night before still lurking in his furtive eyes and in his twitching features.

"You have come to see his Grace? I am sorry; but the fact is that the duke is far from well. He has been very much upset by the tragic news. We received a telegram from Dr. Huxtable yesterday afternoon, which told us of your discovery."

"I must see the duke, Mr. Wilder."

"But he is in his room."

"Then I must go to his room."

"I believe he is in his bed."

"I will see him there."

Holmes's cold and inexorable manner showed the secretary that it was useless to argue with him.

"Very good, Mr. Holmes; I will tell him that you are here."

After half an hour's delay the great nobleman appeared. His face was more cadaverous than ever, his shoulders had rounded, and he seemed to me to be an altogether older man than he had been the morning before. He greeted us with a stately courtesy, and seated himself at his desk, his red beard streaming down on to the table.

"Well, Mr. Holmes?" said he.

But my friend's eyes were fixed upon the secretary, who stood by his master's chair.

"I think, your Grace, that I could speak more freely in Mr. Wilder's absence."

The man turned a shade paler and cast a malignant glance at Holmes.

"If your Grace wishes—"

"Yes, yes; you had better go. Now, Mr. Holmes, what have you to say?"

My friend waited until the door had closed behind the retreating secretary.

"The fact is, your Grace," said he, "that my colleague, Dr. Watson, and myself had an assurance from Dr. Huxtable that a reward had been offered in this case. I should like to have this confirmed from your own lips."

"Certainly, Mr. Holmes."

"It amounted, if I am correctly informed, to five thousand pounds to any one who will tell you where your son is?"

"Exactly."

"And another thousand to the man who will name the person or persons who keep him in custody?"

"Exactly."

"Under the latter heading is included, no doubt, not only those who may have taken him away, but also those who conspire to keep him in his present position?"

"Yes, yes," cried the duke impatiently. "If you do your work well, Mr. Sherlock Holmes, you will have no reason to complain of niggardly treatment."

My friend rubbed his thin hands together with an appearance of avidity which was a surprise to me, who knew his frugal tastes.

"I fancy that I see your Grace's cheque-book upon the table," said he. "I should be glad if you would make me out a cheque for six thousand pounds. It would be as well, perhaps, for you to cross it. The Capital and Counties Bank, Oxford Street branch, are my agents."

His Grace sat very stern and upright in his chair, and looked stonily at my friend.

"Is this a joke, Mr. Holmes? It is hardly a subject for pleasantry."

"Not at all, your Grace. I was never more earnest in my life."

"What do you mean, then?"

"I mean that I have earned the reward. I know where your son is, and I know some, at least, of those who are holding him."

The duke's beard had turned more aggressively red than ever against his ghastly white face.

"Where is he?" he gasped.

"He is, or was last night, at the Fighting Cock Inn, about two miles from your park gate."

The duke fell back in his chair.

"And whom do you accuse?"

Sherlock Holmes's answer was an astounding one. He stepped swiftly forward and touched the duke upon the shoulder.

"I accuse *you*," said he. "And now, your Grace, I'll trouble you for that cheque."

Never shall I forget the duke's appearance as he sprang up and clawed with his hand like one who is sinking into an abyss. Then, with an extraordinary effort of aristocratic self-command, he sat down and sank his face in his hands. It was some minutes before he spoke.

"How much do you know?" he asked at last, without raising his head.

"I saw you together last night."

"Does any one else besides your friend know?"

"I have spoken to no one."

The duke took a pen in his quivering fingers and opened his cheque-book.

"I shall be as good as my word, Mr. Holmes. I am about to write your cheque, however unwelcome the information which you have gained may be to me. When the offer was first made I little thought the turn which events would take. But you and your friend are men of discretion, Mr. Holmes?"

"I hardly understand your Grace."

"I must put it plainly, Mr. Holmes. If only you two know of the incident, there is no reason why it should go any farther. I think twelve thousand pounds is the sum that I owe you, is it not?"

But Holmes smiled, and shook his head.

"I fear, your Grace, that matters can hardly be arranged so easily. There is the death of this schoolmaster to be accounted for."

"But James knew nothing of that. You cannot hold him responsible for that. It was the work of this brutal ruffian whom he had the misfortune to employ."

"I must take the view, your Grace, that when a man embarks upon a crime he is morally guilty of any other crime which may spring from it."

"Morally, Mr. Holmes. No doubt you are right. But surely not in the eyes of the law. A man cannot be condemned for a murder at which he was not present, and which he loathes and abhors as much as you do. The instant that he heard of it he made a complete confession to me, so filled was he with horror and remorse. He lost not an hour in breaking entirely with the murderer. Oh, Mr. Holmes, you must save him—you must save him! I tell you that you must save him!" The duke had dropped the last attempt at self-command, and was pacing the room with a convulsed face and with his clenched hands waving in the air. At last he mastered himself and sat down once more at his desk. "I appreciate your conduct in coming here before you spoke to any one else," said he. "At least we may take counsel how far we can minimise this hideous scandal."

"Exactly," said Holmes. "I think, your Grace, that this can only be done by absolute and complete frankness between us. I am disposed to help your Grace to the best of my ability; but in order to do so I must understand to the last detail how the matter stands. I realise that your words applied to Mr. James Wilder, and that he is not the murderer."

"No; the murderer has escaped."

Sherlock Holmes smiled demurely.

"Your Grace can hardly have heard of any small reputation which I possess, or you would not imagine that it is so easy to escape me. Mr. Reuben Hayes was arrested at Chesterfield on my information at eleven o'clock last night. I had a telegram from the head of the local police before I left the school this morning."

The duke leaned back in his chair and stared with amazement at my friend.

"You seem to have powers that are hardly human," said he. "So Reuben Hayes is taken? I am right glad to hear it, if it will not react upon the fate of James."

"Your secretary?"

"No, sir; my son."

It was Holmes's turn to look astonished.

"I confess that this is entirely new to me, your Grace, I must beg of you to be more explicit."

"I will conceal nothing from you. I agree with you that complete frankness, however painful it may be to me, is the best policy in this desperate situation to which James's folly and jealousy have reduced us. When I was a young man, Mr. Holmes, I loved with such a love as comes only once in a lifetime. I offered the lady marriage, but she refused it on the grounds that such a match might mar my career. Had she lived I would certainly never have married any one else. She died, and left this one child, whom for her sake I have cherished and cared for. I could not acknowledge the paternity to the world; but I gave him the best of educations, and since he came to manhood I have kept him near my person. He surprised my secret, and has presumed ever since upon the claim which he has upon me and upon his power of provoking a scandal, which would be abhorrent to me. His presence had something to do with the unhappy issue of my marriage. Above all, he hated my young legitimate heir from the first with a persistent hatred. You may well ask me why, under these circumstances, I still kept James under my roof. I answer that it was because I could see his mother's face in his, and that for her dear sake there was no end to my longsuffering. All her pretty ways, too—there was not one of them which he could not suggest and bring back to my memory. I *could* not send him away. But I feared so lest he should do Arthur—that is, Lord Saltire—a mischief that I despatched him for safety to Dr. Huxtable's school.

"James came into contact with this fellow Hayes because the man was a tenant of mine, and James acted as agent. The fellow was a rascal from the beginning; but in some extraordinary way James became intimate with him. He had always a taste for low company. When James determined to kidnap Lord Saltire it was of this man's service that he availed himself. You remember that I wrote to Arthur upon that last day. Well, James opened the letter and inserted a note asking Arthur to meet him in a little wood called the Ragged Shaw which is near to the school. He used the duchess's name, and in that way got the boy to come. That evening James cycled over—I am telling you what he has himself confessed to me—and he told Arthur, whom he met in the wood, that his mother longed to see him, that she was awaiting him on the moor, and that if he would come back into the wood at midnight he would find a man with a horse, who would take him to her. Poor Arthur fell into the trap. He came to the appointment, and found this fellow Hayes with a led pony. Arthur mounted, and they set off together. It appears—though this James only heard yesterday—that they were pursued, that Hayes struck the pursuer with his stick, and that the man died of his injuries. Hayes brought Arthur to his public-house, the 'Fighting Cock,' where he was confined in an upper room, under the care of Mrs. Hayes, who is a kindly woman, but entirely under the control of her brutal husband.

"Well, Mr. Holmes, that was the state of affairs when I first saw you two days

ago. I had no more idea of the truth than you. You will ask me what was James's motive in doing such a deed. I answer that there was a great deal which was unreasoning and fanatical in the hatred which he bore my heir. In his view he should himself have been heir of all my estates, and he deeply resented those social laws which made it impossible. At the same time, he had a definite motive also. He was eager that I should break the entail, and he was of opinion that it lay in my power to do so. He intended to make a bargain with me—to restore Arthur if I would break the entail, and so make it possible for the estate to be left to him by will. He knew well that I should never willingly invoke the aid of the police against him. I say that he would have proposed such a bargain to me, but he did not actually do so, for events moved too quickly for him, and he had not time to put his plans into practice.

"What brought all his wicked scheme to wreck was your discovery of this man Heidegger's dead body. James was seized with horror at the news. It came to us yesterday as we sat together in this study. Dr. Huxtable had sent a telegram. James was so overwhelmed with grief and agitation that my suspicions, which had never been entirely absent, rose instantly to a certainty, and I taxed him with the deed. He made a complete voluntary confession. Then he implored me to keep his secret for three days longer, so as to give his wretched accomplice a chance of saving his guilty life. I yielded—as I have always yielded—to his prayers, and instantly James hurried off to the 'Fighting Cock' to warn Hayes and give him the means of flight. I could not go there by daylight without provoking comment, but as soon as night fell I hurried off to see my dear Arthur. I found him safe and well, but horrified beyond expression by the dreadful deed he had witnessed. In deference to my promise, and much against my will, I consented to leave him there for three days under the charge of Mrs. Hayes, since it was evident that it was impossible to inform the police where he was without telling them also who was the murderer, and I could not see how that murderer could be punished without ruin to my unfortunate James. You asked for frankness, Mr. Holmes, and I have taken you at your word, for I have now told you everything without an attempt at circumlocution or concealment. Do you in your turn be as frank with me."

"I will," said Holmes. "In the first place, your Grace, I am bound to tell you that you have placed yourself in a most serious position in the eyes of the law. You have condoned a felony, and you have aided the escape of a murderer; for I cannot doubt that any money which was taken by James Wilder to aid his accomplice in his flight came from your Grace's purse."

The duke bowed his assent.

"This is indeed a most serious matter. Even more culpable, in my opinion, your Grace, is your attitude towards your younger son. You leave him in this den for three days."

"Under solemn promises—"

"What are promises to such people as these? You have no guarantee that he will not be spirited away again. To humour your guilty elder son you have ex-

posed your innocent younger son to imminent and unnecessary danger. It was a most unjustifiable action."

The proud lord of Holdernesse was not accustomed to be so rated in his own ducal hall. The blood flushed into his high forehead, but his conscience held him dumb.

"I will help you, but on one condition only. It is that you ring for the footman and let me give such orders as I like."

Without a word the duke pressed the electric button. A servant entered.

"You will be glad to hear," said Holmes, "that your young master is found. It is the duke's desire that the carriage shall go at once to the Fighting Cock Inn to bring Lord Saltire home."

"Now," said Holmes, when the rejoicing lackey had disappeared, "having secured the future we can afford to be more lenient with the past. I am not in an official position, and there is no reason, so long as the ends of justice are served, why I should disclose all that I know. As to Hayes I say nothing. The gallows awaits him, and I would do nothing to save him from it. What he will divulge I cannot tell, but I have no doubt that your Grace could make him understand that it is to his interest to be silent. From the police point of view he will have kidnapped the boy for the purpose of ransom. If they do not themselves find it out I see no reason why I should prompt them to take a broader view. I would warn your Grace, however, that the continued presence of Mr. James Wilder in your household can only lead to misfortune."

"I understand that, Mr. Holmes, and it is already settled that he shall leave me for ever and go to seek his fortune in Australia."

"In that case, your Grace, since you have yourself stated that any unhappiness in your married life was caused by his presence, I would suggest that you make such amends as you can to the duchess, and that you try to resume those relations which have been so unhappily interrupted."

"That also I have arranged, Mr. Holmes. I wrote to the duchess this morning."

"In that case," said Holmes, rising, "I think that my friend and I can congratulate ourselves upon several most happy results from our little visit to the North. There is one other small point upon which I desire some light. This fellow Hayes had shod his horses with shoes which counterfeited the tracks of cows. Was it from Mr. Wilder that he learned so extraordinary a device?"

The duke stood in thought for a moment, with a look of intense surprise on his face. Then he opened a door and showed us into a large room furnished as a museum. He led the way to a glass case in a corner, and pointed to the inscription.

"These shoes," it ran, "were dug up in the moat of Holdernesse Hall. They are for the use of horses; but they are shaped below with a cloven foot of iron, so as to throw pursuers off the track. They are supposed to have belonged to some of the marauding Barons of Holdernesse in the Middle Ages."

Holmes opened the case, and, moistening his finger, he passed it along the shoe. A thin film of recent mud was left upon his skin.

"Thank you," said he, as he replaced the glass. "It is the second most interesting object that I have seen in the North."

"And the first?"

Holmes folded up his cheque, and placed it carefully in his notebook. "I am a poor man," said he, as he patted it affectionately, and thrust it into the depths of his inner pocket.

Ernest Bramah

THE GHOST AT MASSINGHAM MANSIONS

from THE EYES OF MAX CARRADOS

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Do you believe in ghosts, Max?" inquired Mr. Carlyle.

"Only as ghosts," replied Carrados with decision.

"Quite so," assented the private detective with the air of acquiescence with which he was wont to cloak his moments of obfuscation. Then he added cautiously: "And how don't you believe in them, pray?"

"As public nuisances—or private ones for that matter," replied his friend. "So long as they are content to behave as ghosts I am with them. When they begin to meddle with a state of existence that is outside their province—to interfere in business matters and depreciate property—to rattle chains, bang doors, ring bells, predict winners, and to edit magazines—and to attract attention instead of shunning it, I cease to believe. My sympathies are entirely with the sensible old fellow who was awakened in the middle of the night to find a shadowy form standing by the side of his bed and silently regarding him. For a few minutes the disturbed man waited patiently, expecting some awful communication, but the same profound silence was maintained. 'Well,' he remarked at length, 'if you have nothing to do, I have,' and turning over went to sleep again."

"I have been asked to take up a ghost," Carlyle began to explain.

"Then I don't believe in it," declared Carrados.

"Why not?"

"Because it is a pushful, notoriety-loving ghost, or it would not have gone so far. Probably it wants to get into the *Daily Mail*. The other people, whoever they are, don't believe in it, either, Louis, or they wouldn't have called you in. They would have gone to Sir Oliver Lodge for an explanation, or to the nearest priest for a stoup of holy water."

"I admit that I shall direct my researches towards the forces of this world

before I begin to investigate any other," conceded Louis Carlyle. "And I don't doubt," he added, with his usual bland complacence, "that I shall hale up some mischievous or aggrieved individual before the ghost is many days older. Now that you have brought me so far, do you care to go on round to the place with me, Max, to hear what they have to say about it?"

Carrados agreed with his usual good nature. He rarely met his friend without hearing the details of some new case, for Carlyle's practice had increased vastly since the night when chance had led him into the blind man's study. They discussed the cases according to their interest, and there the matter generally ended so far as Max Carrados was concerned, until he casually heard the result subsequently from Carlyle's lips or learned the sequel from the newspaper. But these pages are primarily a record of the methods of the one man whose name they bear and therefore for the occasional case that Carrados completed for his friend there must be assumed the unchronicled scores which the enquiry agent dealt capably with himself. This reminder is perhaps necessary to dissipate the impression that Louis Carlyle was a pretentious humbug. He was, as a matter of fact, in spite of his amiable foibles and the self-assurance that was, after all, merely an asset of his trade, a shrewd and capable business man of his world, and behind his office manner nothing concerned him more than to pocket fees for which he felt that he had failed to render value.

Massingham Mansions proved to be a single block of residential flats overlooking a recreation ground. It was, as they afterwards found, an adjunct to a larger estate of similar property situated down another road. A porter, residing in the basement, looked after the interests of Massingham Mansions; the business office was placed among the other flats. On that morning it presented the appearance of a well-kept, prosperous enough place, a little dull, a little unfinished, a little depressing perhaps; in fact faintly reminiscent of the superfluous mansions that stand among broad, weedy roads on the outskirts of overgrown seaside resorts; but it was persistently raining at the time when Mr. Carlyle had his first view of it.

"It is early to judge," he remarked, after stopping the car in order to verify the name on the brass plate, "but, upon my word, Max, I really think that our ghost might have discovered more appropriate quarters."

At the office, to which the porter had directed them, they found a managing clerk and two coltish youths in charge. Mr. Carlyle's name produced an appreciable flutter.

"The governor isn't here just now, but I have this matter in hand," said the clerk with an easy air of responsibility—an effect unfortunately marred by a sudden irrepressible giggle from the least overawed of the colts. "Will you kindly step into our private room?" He turned at the door of the inner office and dropped a freezing eye on the offender. "Get those letters copied before you go out to lunch, Binns," he remarked in a sufficiently loud voice. Then he closed the door quickly, before Binns could find a suitable retort.

So far it had been plain sailing, but now, brought face to face with the necessity of explaining, the clerk began to develop some hesitancy in beginning.

"It's a funny sort of business," he remarked, skirting the difficulty.

"Perhaps," admitted Mr. Carlyle; "but that will not embarrass us. Many of the cases that pass through my hands are what you would call 'funny sorts of business.'"

"I suppose so," responded the young man, "but not through ours. Well, this is at 11 Massingham. A few nights ago—I suppose it must be more than a week now—Willett, the estate porter, was taking up some luggage to 75 Northanger for the people there when he noticed a light in one of the rooms at 11 Massingham. The backs face, though about twenty or thirty yards away. It struck him as curious, because 11 Massingham is empty and locked up. Naturally he thought at first that the porter at Massingham or one of us from the office had gone up for something. Still it was so unusual—being late at night—that it was his business to look into it. On his way round—you know where Massingham Mansions are?—he had to pass here. It was dark, for we'd all been gone hours, but Willett has duplicate keys and he let himself in. Then he began to think that something must be wrong, for here, hanging up against their number on the board, were the only two keys of 11 Massingham that there are supposed to be. He put the keys in his pocket and went on to Massingham. Green, the resident porter there, told him that he hadn't been into No. 11 for a week. What was more, no one had passed the outer door, in or out, for a good half-hour. He knew that, because the door 'springs' with a noise when it is opened, no matter how carefully. So the two of them went up. The door of No. 11 was locked and inside everything was as it should be. There was no light then, and after looking well round with the lanterns that they carried they were satisfied that no one was concealed there."

"You say lanterns," interrupted Mr. Carlyle. "I suppose they lit the gas, or whatever it is there, as well?"

"It is gas, but they could not light it because it was cut off at the meter. We always cut it off when a flat becomes vacant."

"What sort of a light was it, then, that Willett saw?"

"It was gas, Mr. Carlyle. It is possible to see the bracket in that room from 75 Northanger. He saw it burning."

"Then the meter had been put on again?"

"It is in a locked cupboard in the basement. Only the office and the porters have keys. They tried the gas in the room and it was dead out; they looked at the meter in the basement afterwards and it was dead off."

"Very good," observed Mr. Carlyle, noting the facts in his pocket-book. "What next?"

"The next," continued the clerk, "was something that had really happened before. When they got down again—Green and Willett—Green was rather chipping Willett about seeing the light, you know, when he stopped suddenly. He'd remembered something. The day before the servant at 12 Massingham had asked him who it was that was using the bathroom at No. 11—she of course knowing that it was empty. He told her that no one used the bathroom. 'Well,' she said, 'we hear the water running and splashing almost every night and it's funny with no one there.' He had thought nothing of it at the time, concluding—as he told

her—that it must be the water in the bathroom of one of the underneath flats that they heard. Of course he told Willett then and they went up again and examined the bathroom more closely. Water had certainly been run there, for the sides of the bath were still wet. They tried the taps and not a drop came. When a flat is empty we cut off the water like the gas."

"At the same place—the cupboard in the basement?" enquired Carlyle.

"No; at the cistern in the roof. The trap is at the top of the stairs and you need a longish ladder to get there. The next morning Willett reported what he'd seen and the governor told me to look into it. We didn't think much of it so far. That night I happened to be seeing some friends to the station here—I live not so far off—and I thought I might as well take a turn round here on my way home. I knew that if a light was burning I should be able to see the window lit up from the yard at the back, although the gas itself would be out of sight. And, sure enough, there was the light blazing out of one of the windows of No. 11. I won't say that I didn't feel a bit home-sick then, but I'd made up my mind to go up."

"Good man," murmured Mr. Carlyle approvingly.

"Wait a bit," recommended the clerk, with a shame-faced laugh. "So far I had only had to make my mind up. It was then close on midnight and not a soul about. I came here for the keys, and I also had the luck to remember an old revolver that had been lying about in a drawer of the office for years. It wasn't loaded, but it didn't seem quite so lonely with it. I put it in my pocket and went on to Massingham, taking another turn into the yard to see that the light was still on. Then I went up the stairs as quietly as I could and let myself into No. 11."

"You didn't take Willett or Green with you?"

The clerk gave Mr. Carlyle a knowing look, as of one smart man who will be appreciated by another.

"Willett's a very trustworthy chap," he replied, "and we have every confidence in him. Green also, although he has not been with us so long. But I thought it just as well to do it on my own, you understand, Mr. Carlyle. You didn't look in at Massingham on your way? Well, if you had you would have seen that there is a pane of glass above every door, frosted glass to the hall doors and plain over each of those inside. It's to light the halls and passages, you know. Each flat has a small square hall and a longish passage leading off it. As soon as I opened the door I could tell that one of the rooms down the passage was lit up, though I could not see the door of it from there. Then I crept very quietly through the hall into the passage. A regular stream of light was shining from above the end door on the left. The room, I knew, was the smallest in the flat—it's generally used for a servant's bedroom or sometimes for a box-room. It was a bit thick, you'll admit—right at the end of a long passage and midnight, and after what the others had said."

"Yes, yes," assented the enquiry agent. "But you went on?"

"I went on, tiptoeing without a sound. I got to the door, took out my pistol, put my hand almost on the handle and then——"

"Well, well," prompted Mr. Carlyle, as the narrator paused provokingly, with the dramatic instinct of an expert raconteur, "what then?"

"Then the light went out; while my hand was within an inch of the handle the light went out, as clean as if I had been watched all along and the thing timed. It went out all at once, without any warning and without the slightest sound from the beastly room beyond. And then it was as black as hell in the passage and something seemed to be going to happen."

"What did you do?"

"I did a slope," acknowledged the clerk frankly. "I broke all the records down that passage, I bet you. You'll laugh, I dare say, and think you would have stood, but you don't know what it was like. I'd been screwing myself up, wondering what I should see in that lighted room when I opened the door, and then the light went out like a knife, and for all I knew the next second the door would open on me in the dark and Christ only knows what come out."

"Probably I should have run also," conceded Mr. Carlyle tactfully. "And you, Max?"

"You see, I always feel at home in the dark," apologised the blind man. "At all events you got safely away, Mr. —?"

"My name's Elliott," responded the clerk. "Yes, you may bet I did. Whether the door opened and anybody or anything came out or not I can't say. I didn't look. I certainly did get an idea that I heard the bath water running and swishing as I snatched at the hall door, but I didn't stop to consider that either, and if it was, the noise was lost in the slam of the door and my clatter as I took about twelve flights of stairs six steps at a time. Then when I was safely out I did venture to go round to look up again, and there was that damned light full on again."

"Really?" commented Mr. Carlyle. "That was very audacious of him."

"Him? Oh, well, yes, I suppose so. That's what the governor insists, but he hasn't been up there himself in the dark."

"Is that as far as you have got?"

"It's as far as we can get. The bally thing goes on just as it likes. The very next day we tied up the taps of the gas-meter and the water cistern and sealed the string. Bless you, it didn't make a ha'peth of difference. Scarcely a night passes without the light showing, and there's no doubt that the water runs. We've put copying ink on the door handles and the taps and got into it ourselves until there isn't a man about the place that you couldn't implicate."

"Has anyone watched up there?"

"Willett and Green together did one night. They shut themselves up in the room opposite from ten till twelve and nothing happened. I was watching the window with a pair of opera-glasses from an empty flat here—85 Northanger. Then they chucked it, and before they could have been down the steps the light was there—I could see the gas as plain as I can see this ink-stand. I ran down and met them coming to tell me that nothing had happened. The three of us sprinted up again and the light was out and the flat as deserted as a churchyard. What do you make of that?"

"It certainly requires looking into," replied Mr. Carlyle diplomatically.

"Looking into! Well, you're welcome to look all day and all night too, Mr. Carlyle. It isn't as though it was an old baronial mansion, you see, with sliding panels and secret passages. The place has the date over the front door, 1882–1882 and haunted, by gosh! It was built for what it is, and there isn't an inch unaccounted for between the slates and the foundation."

"These two things—the lights and the water running—are the only indications there have been?" asked Mr. Carlyle.

"So far as we ourselves have seen or heard. I ought perhaps to tell you of something else, however. When this business first started I made a few casual enquiries here and there among the tenants. Among others I saw Mr. Belting, who occupies 9 Massingham—the flat directly beneath No. 11. It didn't seem any good making up a cock-and-bull story, so I put it to him plainly—had he been annoyed by anything unusual going on at the empty flat above?

" 'If you mean your confounded ghost up there, I have not been particularly annoyed,' he said at once, 'but Mrs. Belting has, and I should advise you to keep out of her way, at least until she gets another servant.' Then he told me that their girl, who slept in the bedroom underneath the little one at No. 11, had been going on about noises in the room above—footsteps and tramping and a bump on the floor—for some time before we heard anything of it. Then one day she suddenly said that she'd had enough of it and bolted. That was just before Willett first saw the light."

"It is being talked about, then—among the tenants?"

"You bet!" assented Mr. Elliott pungently. "That's what gets the governor. He wouldn't give a continental if no one knew, but you can't tell where it will end. The people at Northanger don't half like it either. All the children are scared out of their little wits and none of the slaveys will run errands after dark. It'll give the estate a bad name for the next three years if it isn't stopped."

"It shall be stopped," declared Mr. Carlyle impressively. "Of course we have our methods for dealing with this sort of thing, but in order to make a clean sweep it is desirable to put our hands on the offender *in flagranti delicto*. Tell your—er—principal not to have any further concern in the matter. One of my people will call here for any further details that he may require during the day. Just leave everything as it is in the meanwhile. Good-morning, Mr. Elliott, good-morning. . . . A fairly obvious game, I imagine, Max," he commented as they got into the car, "although the details are original and the motive not disclosed as yet. I wonder how many of them are in it?"

"Let me know when you find out," said Carrados, and Mr. Carlyle promised.

Nearly a week passed and the expected revelation failed to make its appearance. Then, instead, quite a different note arrived:

"My Dear Max,—I wonder if you formed any conclusion of that Massingham Mansions affair from Mr. Elliott's refined narrative of the circumstances?

"I begin to suspect that Trigget, whom I put on, is somewhat of an ass,

though a very remarkable circumstance has come to light which might—if it wasn't a matter of business—offer an explanation of the whole business by stamping it as inexplicable.

"You know how I value your suggestions. If you happen to be in the neighbourhood—not otherwise, Max, I protest—I should be glad if you would drop in for a chat.

"Yours sincerely,
"Louis Carlyle."

Carrados smiled at the ingenuous transparency of the note. He had thought several times of the case since the interview with Elliott, chiefly because he was struck by certain details of the manifestation that divided it from the ordinary methods of the bogy-raiser, an aspect that had apparently made no particular impression on his friend. He was sufficiently interested not to let the day pass without "happening" to be in the neighbourhood of Bampton Street.

"Max," exclaimed Mr. Carlyle, raising an accusing forefinger, "you have come on purpose."

"If I have," replied the visitor, "you can reward me with a cup of that excellent beverage that you were able to conjure up from somewhere down in the basement on a former occasion. As a matter of fact, I have."

Mr. Carlyle transmitted the order and then demanded his friend's serious attention.

"That ghost at Massingham Mansions—"

"I still don't believe in that particular ghost, Louis," commented Carrados in mild speculation.

"I never did, of course," replied Carlyle, "but, upon my word, Max, I shall have to very soon as a precautionary measure. Trigget has been able to do nothing and now he has as good as gone on strike."

"Downed—now what on earth can an enquiry man down to go on strike, Louis? Note-books? So Trigget has got a chill, like our candid friend Elliott, eh?"

"He started all right—said that he didn't mind spending a night or a week in a haunted flat, and, to do him justice, I don't believe he did at first. Then he came across a very curious piece of forgotten local history, a very remarkable —er—coincidence in the circumstances, Max."

"I was wondering," said Carrados, "when we should come up against that story, Louis."

"Then you know of it?" exclaimed the enquiry agent in surprise.

"Not at all. Only I guessed it must exist. Here you have the manifestation associated with two things which in themselves are neither usual nor awe-inspiring—the gas and the water. It requires some association to connect them up, to give them point and force. That is the story."

"Yes," assented his friend, "that is the story, and, upon my soul, in the circumstances—well, you shall hear it. It comes partly from the newspapers of many years ago, but only partly, for the circumstances were successfully hushed up in a large measure and it required the stimulated memories of ancient

scandalmongers to fill in the details. Oh yes, it was a scandal, Max, and would have been a great sensation too, I do not doubt, only they had no proper pictorial Press in those days, poor beggars. It was very soon after Massingham Mansions had been erected—they were called Enderby House in those days, by the way, for the name was changed on account of this very business. The household at No. 11 consisted of a comfortable, middle-aged married couple and one servant, a quiet and attractive young creature, one is led to understand. As a matter of fact, I think they were the first tenants of that flat."

"The first occupants give the soul to a new house," remarked the blind man gravely. "That is why empty houses have their different characters."

"I don't doubt it for a moment," assented Mr. Carlyle in his incisive way, "but none of our authorities on this case made any reference to the fact. They did say, however, that the man held a good and responsible position—a position for which high personal character and strict morality were essential. He was also well known and regarded in quiet but substantial local circles where serious views prevailed. He was, in short, a man of notorious 'respectability.'

"The first chapter of the tragedy opened with the painful death of the prepossessing handmaiden—suicide, poor creature. She didn't appear one morning and the flat was full of the reek of gas. With great promptitude the master threw all the windows open and called up the porter. They burst open the door of the little bedroom at the end of the passage, and there was the thing as clear as daylight for any coroner's jury to see. The door was locked on the inside and the extinguished gas was turned full on. It was only a tiny room, with no fireplace, and the ventilation of a closed well-fitting door and window was negligible in the circumstances. At all events the girl was proved to have been dead for several hours when they reached her, and the doctor who conducted the autopsy crowned the convincing fabric of circumstances when he mentioned as delicately as possible that the girl had a very pressing reason for dreading an inevitable misfortune that would shortly overtake her. The jury returned the obvious verdict.

"There have been many undiscovered crimes in the history of mankind, Max, but it is by no means every ingenious plot that carries. After the inquest, at which our gentleman doubtless cut a very proper and impressive figure, the barbed whisper began to insinuate and to grow in freedom. It is sheerly impossible to judge how these things start, but we know that when once they have been begun they gather material like an avalanche. It was remembered by someone at the flat underneath that late on the fatal night a window in the principal bedroom above had been heard to open, top and bottom, very quietly. Certain other sounds of movement in the night did not tally with the tale of sleep-wrapped innocence. Sceptical busybodies were anxious to demonstrate practically to those who differed from them on this question that it was quite easy to extinguish a gas-jet in one room by blowing down the gas-pipe in another; and in this connection there was evidence that the lady of the flat had spoken to her friends more than once of her sentimental young servant's extravagant habit of reading herself to sleep occasionally with the light full on. Why was

nothing heard at the inquest, they demanded, of the curious fact that an open novelette lay on the counterpane when the room was broken into? A hundred trifling circumstances were adduced—arrangements that the girl had been making for the future down to the last evening of her life—interpretable hints that she had dropped to her acquaintances—her views on suicide and the best means to that end: a favourite topic, it would seem, among her class—her possession of certain comparatively expensive trinkets on a salary of a very few shillings a week, and so on. Finally, some rather more definite and important piece of evidence must have been conveyed to the authorities, for we know now that one fine day a warrant was issued. Somehow rumour preceded its execution. The eminently respectable genleman with whom it was concerned did not wait to argue out the merits of the case. He locked himself in the bath-room, and when the police arrived they found that instead of an arrest they had to arrange the details for another inquest."

"A very convincing episode," conceded Carrados in response to his friend's expectant air. "And now her spirit passes the long winter evenings turning the gas on and off, and the one amusement of his consists in doing the same with the bath-water—or the other way, the other way about, Louis. Truly, one half the world knows not how the other half lives!"

"All your cheap humour won't induce Trigget to spend another night in that flat, Max," retorted Mr. Carlyle. "Nor, I am afraid, will it help me through this business in any other way."

"Then I'll give you a hint that may," said Carrados. "Try your respectable gentleman's way of settling difficulties."

"What is that?" demanded his friend.

"Blow down the pipes, Louis."

"Blow down the pipes?" repeated Carlyle.

"At all events try it. I infer that Mr. Trigget has not experimented in that direction."

"But what will it do, Max?"

"Possibly it will demonstrate where the other end goes to."

"But the other end goes to the meter."

"I suggest not—not without some interference with its progress. I have already met your Mr. Trigget, you know, Louis. An excellent and reliable man within his limits, but he is at his best posted outside the door of an hotel waiting to see the co-respondent go in. He hasn't enough imagination for this case—not enough to carry him away from what would be his own obvious method of doing it to what is someone else's equally obvious but quite different method. Unless I am doing him an injustice, he will have spent most of his time trying to catch someone getting into the flat to turn the gas and water on and off, whereas I conjecture that no one does go into the flat because it is perfectly simple—ingenious but simple—to produce these phenomena without. Then when Mr. Trigget has satisfied himself that it is physically impossible for anyone to be going in and out, and when, on the top of it, he comes across this romantic tragedy—a tale that might psychologically explain the ghost, simply because the

ghost is moulded on the tragedy—then, of course, Mr. Trigget's mental process is swept away from its moorings and his feet begin to get cold."

"This is very curious and suggestive," said Mr. Carlyle. "I certainly assumed ——But shall we have Trigget up and question him on the point? I think he ought to be here now—if he isn't detained at the Bull."

Carrados assented, and in a few minutes Mr. Trigget presented himself at the door of the private office. He was a melancholy-looking middle-aged little man, with an ineradicable air of being exactly what he was, and the searcher for deeper or subtler indications of character would only be rewarded by a latent pessimism grounded on the depressing probability that he would never be anything else.

"Come in, Trigget," called out Mr. Carlyle when his employee diffidently appeared. "Come in. Mr. Carrados would like to hear some of the details of the Massingham Mansions case."

"Not the first time I have availed myself of the benefit of your enquiries, Mr. Trigget," nodded the blind man. "Good-afternoon."

"Good-afternoon, sir," replied Trigget with gloomy deference. "It's very handsome of you to put it in that way, Mr. Carrados, sir. But this isn't another Tarporley-Templeton case, if I may say so, sir. That was as plain as a pikestaff after all, sir."

"When we saw the pikestaff, Mr. Trigget; yes, it was," admitted Carrados, with a smile. "But this is insoluble? Ah, well. When I was a boy I used to be extraordinarily fond of ghost stories, I remember, but even while reading them I always had an uneasy suspicion that when it came to the necessary detail of explaining the mystery I should be defrauded with some subterfuge as 'by an ingenious arrangement of hidden wires the artful Muggles had contrived,' etc., or 'an optical illusion effected by means of concealed mirrors revealed the *modus operandi* of the apparition.' I thought that I had been swindled. I think so still. I hope there are no ingenious wires or concealed mirrors here, Mr. Trigget?"

Mr. Trigget looked mildly sagacious but hopelessly puzzled. It was his misfortune that in him the necessities of his business and the proclivities of his nature were at variance, so that he ordinarily presented the curious anomaly of looking equally alert and tired.

"Wires, sir?" he began, with faint amusement.

"Not only wires, but anything that might account for what is going on," interposed Mr. Carlyle. "Mr. Carrados means this, Trigget: you have reported that it is impossible for anyone to be concealed in the flat or to have secret access to it——"

"I have tested every inch of space in all the rooms, Mr. Carrados, sir," protested the hurt Trigget. "I have examined every board and, you may say, every nail in the floor, the skirting-boards, the window frames and in fact wherever a board or a nail exists. There are no secret ways in or out. Then I have taken the most elaborate precautions against the doors and windows being used for surreptitious ingress and egress. They have not been used, sir. For the past week

I am the only person who has been in and out of the flat, Mr. Carrados, and yet night after night the gas that is cut off at the meter is lit and turned out again, and the water that is cut off at the cistern splashes about in the bath up to the second I let myself in. Then it's as quiet as the grave and everything is exactly as I left it. It isn't human, Mr. Carrados, sir, and flesh and blood can't stand it—not in the middle of the night, that is to say."

"You see nothing further, Mr. Trigget?"

"I don't indeed, Mr. Carrados. I would suggest doing away with the gas in that room altogether. As a box-room it wouldn't need one."

"And the bathroom?"

"That might be turned into a small bedroom and all the water fittings removed. Then to provide a bathroom——"

"Yes, yes," interrupted Mr. Carlyle impatiently, "but we are retained to discover who is causing this annoyance and to detect the means, not to suggest structural alterations in the flat, Trigget. The fact is that after having put in a week on this job you have failed to bring us an inch nearer its solution. Now Mr. Carrados has suggested"—Mr. Carlyle was not usually detained among the finer shades of humour, but some appreciation of the grotesqueness of the advice required him to control his voice as he put the matter in its baldest form—"Mr. Carrados has suggested that instead of spending the time measuring the chimneys and listening to the wallpaper, if you had simply blown down the gas-pipe——"

Carrados was inclined to laugh, although he thought it rather too bad of Louis.

"Not quite in those terms, Mr. Trigget," he interposed.

"Blow down the gas-pipe, sir?" repeated the amazed man. "What for?"

"To ascertain where the other end comes out," replied Carlyle.

"But don't you see, sir, that that is a detail until you ascertain how it is being done? The pipe may be tapped between the bath and the cistern. Naturally, I considered that. As a matter of fact, the water-pipe isn't tapped. It goes straight up from the bath to the cistern in the attic above, a distance of only a few feet, and I have examined it. The gas-pipe, it is true, passes through a number of flats, and without pulling up all the floors it isn't practicable to trace it. But how does that help us, Mr. Carrados? The gas-tap has to be turned on and off; you can't do that with these hidden wires. It has to be lit. I've never heard of lighting gas by optical illusions, sir. Somebody must get in and out of the flat or else it isn't human. I've spent a week, a very trying week, sir, in endeavouring to ascertain how it could be done. I haven't shirked cold and wet and solitude, sir, in the discharge of my duty. I've freely placed my poor gifts of observation and intelligence, such as they are, sir, at the service——"

"Not 'freely,' Trigget," interposed his employer with decision.

"I am speaking under a deep sense of injury, Mr. Carlyle," retorted Mr. Trigget, who, having had time to think it over, had now come to the conclusion that he was not appreciated. "I am alluding to a moral attitude such as we all possess. I am very grieved by what has been suggested. I didn't expect it of you, Mr. Carlyle, sir; indeed I did not. For a week I have done everything that it has

been possible to do, everything that a long experience could suggest, and now, as I understand it, sir, you complain that I didn't blow down the gas-pipe, sir. It's hard, sir; it's very hard."

"Oh, well, for heaven's sake don't cry about it, Trigget," exclaimed Mr. Carlyle. "You're always sobbing about the place over something or other. We know you did your best—God help you!" he added aside.

"I did, Mr. Carlyle; indeed I did, sir. And I thank you for that appreciative tribute to my services. I value it highly, very highly indeed, sir." A tremulous note in the rather impassioned delivery made it increasingly plain that Mr. Trigget's regimen had not been confined entirely to solid food that day. His wrongs were forgotten and he approached Mr. Carrados with an engaging air of secrecy.

"What is this tip about blowing down the gas-pipe, sir?" he whispered confidentially. "The old dog's always willing to learn something new."

"Max," said Mr. Carlyle curtly, "is there anything more that we need detain Trigget for?"

"Just this," replied Carrados after a moment's thought. "The gas-bracket—it has a mantle attachment on?"

"Oh no, Mr. Carrados," confided the old dog with the affectation of imparting rather valuable information, "not a mantle on. Oh, certainly no mantle. Indeed —indeed, not a mantle at all."

Mr. Carlyle looked at his friend curiously. It was half evident that something might have miscarried. Furthermore, it was obvious that the warmth of the room and the stress of emotion were beginning to have a disastrous effect on the level of Mr. Trigget's ideas and speech.

"A globe?" suggested Carrados.

"A globe? No, sir, not even a globe, in the strict sense of the word. No globe, that is to say, Mr. Carrados. In fact nothing like a globe."

"What is there, then?" demanded the blind man without any break in his unruffled patience. "There may be another way—but surely—surely there must be some attachment?"

"No," said Mr. Trigget with precision, "no attachment at all; nothing at all; nothing whatsoever. Just the ordinary or common or penny plain gas-jet, and above it the whayoumaycallit thingamabob."

"The shade—gas consumer—of course!" exclaimed Carrados. "That is it."

"The tin thingamabob," insisted Mr. Trigget with slow dignity. "Call it what you will. Its purpose is self-evident. It acts as a dispirator—a distributor, that is to say——"

"Louis," struck in Carrados joyously, "are you good for settling it to-night?"

"Certainly, my dear fellow, if you can really give the time."

"Good; it's years since I last tackled a ghost. What about——?" His look indicated the other member of the council.

"Would he be of any assistance?"

"Perhaps—then."

"What time?"

"Say eleven-thirty."

"Trigget," rapped out his employer sharply, "meet us at the corner of Middlewood and Enderby Roads at half-past eleven sharp to-night. If you can't manage it I shall not require your services again."

"Certainly, sir; I shall not fail to be punctual," replied Trigget without a tremor. The appearance of an almost incredible sobriety had possessed him in the face of warning, and both in speech and manner he was again exactly the man as he had entered the room. "I regard it as a great honour, Mr. Carrados, to be associated with you in this business, sir."

"In the meanwhile," remarked Carrados, "if you find the time hang heavy on your hands you might look up the subject of 'platinum black.' It may be the new tip you want."

"Certainly, sir. But do you mind giving me a hint as to what 'platinum black' is?"

"It is a chemical that has the remarkable property of igniting hydrogen or coal gas by mere contact," replied Carrados. "Think how useful that may be if you haven't got a match!"

To mark the happy occasion Mr. Carlyle had insisted on taking his friend off to witness a popular musical comedy. Carrados had a few preparations to make, a few accessories to procure for the night's work, but the whole business had come within the compass of an hour and the theatre spanned the interval between dinner at the Palm Tree and the time when they left the car at the appointed meeting-place. Mr. Trigget was already there, in an irreproachable state of normal dejection. Parkinson accompanied the party, bringing with him the baggage of the expedition.

"Anything going on, Trigget?" enquired Mr. Carlyle.

"I've made a turn round the place, sir, and the light was on," was the reply. "I didn't go up for fear of disturbing the conditions before you saw them. That was about ten minutes ago. Are you going into the yard to look again? I have all the keys, of course."

"Do we, Max?" queried Mr. Carlyle.

"Mr. Trigget might. We need not all go. He can catch us up again."

He caught them up again before they had reached the outer door.

"It's still on, sir," he reported.

"Do we use any special caution, Max?" asked Carlyle.

"Oh, no. Just as though we were friends of the ghost, calling in the ordinary way."

Trigget, who retained the keys, preceded the party up the stairs till the top was reached. He stood a moment at the door of No. 11 examining, by the light of the electric lamp he carried, his private marks there and pointing out to the others in a whisper that they had not been tampered with. All at once a most dismal wail, lingering, piercing, and ending in something like a sob that died away because the life that gave it utterance had died with it, drawled forebodingly through the echoing emptiness of the deserted flat. Trigget had just

snapped off his light and in the darkness a startled exclamation sprang from Mr. Carlyle's lips.

"It's all right, sir," said the little man, with a private satisfaction that he had the diplomacy to conceal. "Bit creepy, isn't it? Especially when you hear it by yourself up here for the first time. It's only the end of the bath-water running out."

He had opened the door and was conducting them to the room at the end of the passage. A faint aurora had been visible from that direction when they first entered the hall, but it was cut off before they could identify its source.

"That's what happens," muttered Trigget.

He threw open the bedroom door without waiting to examine his marks there and they crowded into the tiny chamber. Under the beams of the lamps they carried, it was brilliantly though erratically illuminated. All turned towards the central object of their quest, a tarnished gas-bracket of the plainest description. A few inches above it hung the metal disc that Trigget had alluded to, for the ceiling was low and at that point it was brought even nearer to the gas by corresponding with the slant of the roof outside.

With the prescience so habitual with him that it had ceased to cause remark among his associates Carrados walked straight to the gas-bracket and touched the burner.

"Still warm," he remarked. "And so are we getting now. A thoroughly material ghost, you perceive, Louis."

"But still turned off, don't you see, Mr. Carrados, sir," put in Trigget eagerly. "And yet no one's passed out."

"Still turned off—and still turned on," commented the blind man.

"What do you mean, Max?"

"The small screwdriver, Parkinson," requested Carrados.

"Well, upon my word!" dropped Mr. Carlyle expressively. For in no longer time than it takes to record the fact Max Carrados had removed a screw and then knocked out the tap. He held it up towards them and they all at once saw that so much of the metal had been filed away that the gas passed through no matter how the tap stood. "How on earth did you know of that?"

"Because it wasn't practicable to do the thing in any other way. Now unhook the shade, Parkinson—carefully."

The warning was not altogether unnecessary, for the man had to stand on tiptoes before he could comply. Carrados received the dingy metal cone and lightly touched its inner surface.

"Ah, here, at the apex, to be sure," he remarked. "The gas is bound to get there. And there, Louis, you have an ever-lit and yet a truly 'safety' match—so far as gas is concerned. You can buy the thing for a shilling, I believe."

Mr. Carlyle was examining the tiny apparatus with interest. So small that it might have passed for the mummy of a midget hanging from a cobweb, it appeared to consist of an insignificant black pellet and an inch of the finest wire.

"Um, I've never heard of it. And this will really light the gas?"

"As often as you like. That is the whole bag of tricks."

Mr. Carlyle turned a censorious eye upon his lieutenant, but Trigget was equal to the occasion and met it without embarrassment.

"I hadn't heard of it either, sir," he remarked conversationally. "Gracious, what won't they be getting out next, Mr. Carlyle!"

"Now for the mystery of the water." Carrados was finding his way to the bathroom and they followed him down the passage and across the hall. "In its way I think that this is really more ingenious than the gas, for, as Mr. Trigget has proved for us, the water does not come from the cistern. The taps, you perceive, are absolutely dry."

"It is forced up?" suggested Mr. Carlyle, nodding towards the outlet.

"That is the obvious alternative. We will test it presently." The blind man was down on his hands and knees following the lines of the different pipes. "Two degrees more cold are not conclusive, because in any case the water has gone out that way. Mr. Trigget, you know the ropes, will you be so obliging as to go up to the cistern and turn the water on."

"I shall need a ladder, sir."

"Parkinson."

"We have a folding ladder out here," said Parkinson, touching Mr. Trigget's arm.

"One moment," interposed Carrados, rising from his investigation among the pipes; "this requires some care. I want you to do it without making a sound or showing a light, if that is possible. Parkinson will help you. Wait until you hear us raising a diversion at the other end of the flat. Come, Louis."

The diversion took the form of tapping the wall and skirting-board in the other haunted room. When Trigget presented himself to report that the water was now in, Carrados put him to continue the singular exercise with Mr. Carlyle while he himself slipped back to the bathroom.

"The pump, Parkinson," he commanded in a brisk whisper to his man, who was waiting in the hall.

The appliance was not unlike a powerful tyre pump with some modifications. One tube from it was quickly fitted to the outlet pipe of the bath, another trailed a loose end into the bath itself, ready to take up the water. There were a few other details, the work of moments. Then Carrados turned on the tap, silencing the inflow by the attachment of a short length of rubber tube. When the water had risen a few inches he slipped off to the other room, told his rather mystified confederates there that he wanted a little more noise and bustle put into their performance, and was back again in the bathroom.

"Now, Parkinson," he directed, and turned off the tap. There was about a foot of water in the bath.

Parkinson stood on the broad base of the pump and tried to drive down the handle. It scarcely moved.

"Harder," urged Carrados, interpreting every detail of sound with perfect accuracy.

Parkinson set his teeth and lunged again. Again he seemed to come up against a solid wall of resistance.

"Keep trying; something must give," said his master encouragingly. "Here, let me—" He threw his weight into the balance and for a moment they hung like a group poised before action. Then, somewhere, something did give and the sheathing plunger "drew."

"Now like blazes till the bath is empty. Then you can tell the others to stop hammering." Parkinson, looking round to acquiesce, found himself alone, for with silent step and quickened senses Carrados was already passing down the dark flights of the broad stone stairway.

It was perhaps three minutes later when an excited gentleman in the state of disrobement that is tacitly regarded as falling upon the *punctum cæcum* in times of fire, flood, and nocturnal emergency shot out of the door of No. 7 and bounding up the intervening flights of steps pounded with the knocker on the door of No. 9. As someone did not appear with the instantaneity of a jack-in-the-box, he proceeded to repeat the summons, interspersing it with an occasional "I say!" shouted through the letter-box.

The light above the door made it unconvincing to affect that no one was at home. The gentleman at the door trumpeted the fact through his channel of communication and demanded instant attention. So immersed was he with his own grievance, in fact, that he failed to notice the approach of someone on the other side, and the sudden opening of the door, when it did take place, surprised him on his knees at his neighbour's doorstep, a large and consequential-looking personage as revealed in the light from the hall, wearing the silk hat that he had instinctively snatched up, but with his braces hanging down.

"Mr. Tupworthy of No. 7, isn't it?" quickly interposed the new man before his visitor could speak. "But why this—homage? Permit me to raise you, sir."

"Confound it all," snorted Mr. Tupworthy indignantly, "you're flooding my flat. The water's coming through my bathroom ceiling in bucketfuls. The plaster'll fall next. Can't you stop it. Has a pipe burst or something?"

"Something, I imagine," replied No. 9 with serene detachment. "At all events it appears to be over now."

"So I should hope," was the irate retort. "It's bad enough as it is. I shall go round to the office and complain. I'll tell you what it is, Mr. Belting: these mansions are becoming a pandemonium, sir, a veritable pandemonium."

"Capital idea; we'll go together and complain: two will be more effective," suggested Mr. Belting. "But not to-night, Mr. Tupworthy. We should not find anyone there. The office will be closed. Say to-morrow—"

"I had no intention of anything so preposterous as going there to-night. I am in no condition to go. If I don't get my feet into hot water at once I shall be laid up with a severe cold. Doubtless you haven't noticed it, but I am wet through to the skin, saturated, sir."

Mr. Belting shook his head sagely.

"Always a mistake to try to stop water coming through the ceiling," he remarked. "It will come, you know. Finds its own level and all that."

"I did not try to stop it—at least not voluntarily. A temporary emergency necessitated a slight rearrangement of our accommodations. I—I tell you this in confidence—I was sleeping in the bathroom."

At the revelation of so notable a catastrophe Mr. Belting actually seemed to stagger. Possibly his eyes filled with tears; certainly he had to turn and wipe away his emotion before he could proceed.

"Not—not right under it?" he whispered.

"I imagine so," replied Mr. Tupworthy. "I do not conceive that I could have been placed more centrally. I received the full cataract in the region of the ear. Well, if I may rely on you that it has stopped, I will terminate our interview for the present."

"Good-night," responded the still tremulous Belting. "Good-night—or good-morning, to be exact." He waited with the door open to light the first flight of stairs for Mr. Tupworthy's descent. Before the door was closed another figure stepped down quietly from the obscurity of the steps leading upwards.

"Mr. Belting, I believe?" said the stranger. "My name is Carrados. I have been looking over the flat above. Can you spare me a few minutes?"

"What, Mr. Max Carrados?"

"The same," smiled the owner of the name.

"Come in, Mr. Carrados," exclaimed Belting, not only without embarrassment, but with positive affection in his voice. "Come in by all means. I've heard of you more than once. Delighted to meet you. This way. I know—I know." He put a hand on his guest's arm and insisted on steering his course until he deposited him in an easy-chair before a fire. "This looks like being a great night. What will you have?"

Carrados put the suggestion aside and raised a corner of the situation.

"I'm afraid that I don't come altogether as a friend," he hinted.

"It's no good," replied his host. "I can't regard you in any other light after this. You heard Tupworthy? But you haven't seen the man, Mr. Carrados. I know—I've heard—but no wealth of the imagination can ever really quite reconstruct Tupworthy, the shoddy magnifico, in his immense porcine complacency, his monumental self-importance. And sleeping right underneath! Gods, but we have lived to-night! Why—why ever did you stop?"

"You associate me with this business?"

"Associate you! My dear Mr. Carrados, I give you the full glorious credit for the one entirely successful piece of low comedy humour in real life that I have ever encountered. Indeed, in a legal and pecuniary sense, I hold you absolutely responsible."

"Oh!" exclaimed Carrados, beginning to laugh quietly. Then he continued: "I think that I shall come through that all right. I shall refer you to Mr. Carlyle, the private enquiry agent, and he will doubtless pass you on to your landlord, for whom he is acting, and I imagine that he in turn will throw all the responsibility on the ingenious gentleman who has put them to so much trouble. Can you guess the result of my investigation in the flat above?"

"Guess, Mr. Carrados? I don't need to guess: I *know*. You don't suppose I

thought for a moment that such transparent devices as two intercepted pipes and an automatic gas-lighter would impose on a man of intelligence? They were only contrived to mystify the credulous imagination of clerks and porters."

"You admit it, then?"

"Admit! Good gracious, of course I admit it, Mr. Carrados. What's the use of denying it?"

"Precisely. I am glad you see that. And yet you seem far from being a mere practical joker. Does your confidence extend to the length of letting me into your object?"

"Between ourselves," replied Mr. Belting, "I haven't the least objection. But I wish that you would have—say a cup of coffee. Mrs. Belting is still up, I believe. She would be charmed to have the opportunity—No? Well, just as you like. Now, my object? You must understand, Mr. Carrados, that I am a man of sufficient leisure and adequate means for the small position we maintain. But I am not unoccupied—not idle. On the contrary, I am always busy. I don't approve of any man passing his time aimlessly. I have a number of interests in life—hobbies, if you like. You should appreciate that, as you are a private criminologist. I am—among other things which don't concern us now—a private retributionist. On every side people are becoming far too careless and negligent. An era of irresponsibility has set in. Nobody troubles to keep his word, to carry out literally his undertakings. In my small way I try to set that right by showing them the logical development of their ways. I am, in fact, the sworn enemy of anything approaching sloppiness. You smile at that?"

"It is a point of view," replied Carrados. "I was wondering how the phrase at this moment would convey itself, say, to Mr. Tupworthy's ear."

Mr. Belting doubled up.

"But don't remind me of Tupworthy or I can't get on," he said. "In my method I follow the system of Herbert Spencer towards children. Of course you are familiar with his treatise on 'Education'? If a rough boy persists, after warnings, in tearing or soiling all his clothes, don't scold him for what, after all, is only a natural and healthy instinct overdone. But equally, of course, don't punish yourself by buying him other clothes. When the time comes for the children to be taken to an entertainment little Tommy cannot go with them. It would not be seemly, and he is too ashamed, to go in rags. He begins to see the force of practical logic. Very well. If a tradesman promises—promises explicitly—delivery of his goods by a certain time and he fails, he finds that he is then unable to leave them. I pay on delivery, by the way. If a man undertakes to make me an article like another—I am painstaking, Mr. Carrados: I point out at the time how exactly like I want it—and it is (as it generally is) on completion something quite different, I decline to be easy-going and to be put off with it. I take the simplest and most obvious instances; I could multiply indefinitely. It is, of course, frequently inconvenient to me, but it establishes a standard."

"I see that you are a dangerous man, Mr. Belting," remarked Carrados. "If most men were like you our national character would be undermined. People would have to behave properly."

"If most men were like me we should constitute an intolerable nuisance," replied Belting seriously. "A necessary reaction towards sloppiness would set in and find me at its head. I am always with minorities."

"And the case in point?"

"The present trouble centres round the kitchen sink. It is cracked and leaks. A trivial cause for so elaborate an outcome, you may say, but you will doubtless remember that two men quarrelling once at a spring as to who should use it first involved half Europe in a war, and the whole tragedy of *Lear* sprang from a silly business round a word. I hadn't noticed the sink when we took this flat, but the landlord had solemnly sworn to do everything that was necessary. Is a new sink necessary to replace a cracked one? Obviously. Well, you know what landlords are: possibly you are one yourself. They promise you heaven until you have signed the agreement and then they tell you to go to hell. Suggested that we'd probably broken the sink ourselves and would certainly be looked to to replace it. An excellent servant caught a cold standing in the drip and left. Was I to be driven into paying for a new sink myself? Very well, I thought, if the reasonable complaint of one tenant is nothing to you, see how you like the unreasonable complaints of fifty. The method served a useful purpose too. When Mrs. Belting heard that old tale about the tragedy at No. 11 she was terribly upset; vowed that she couldn't stay alone in here at night on any consideration.

"'My dear,' I said, 'don't worry yourself about ghosts. I'll make as good a one as ever lived, and then when you see how it takes other people in, just remember next time you hear of another that someone's pulling the string.' And I really don't think that she'll ever be afraid of ghosts again."

"Thank you," said Carrados, rising. "Altogether I have spent a very entertaining evening, Mr. Belting. I hope your retaliatory method won't get you into serious trouble this time."

"Why should it?" demanded Belting quickly.

"Oh, well, tenants are complaining, the property is being depreciated. The landlord may think that he has legal redress against you."

"But surely I am at liberty to light the gas or use the bath in my own flat when and how I like?"

A curious look had come into Mr. Belting's smiling face; a curious note must have sounded in his voice. Carrados was warned and, being warned, guessed.

"You are a wonderful man," he said with upraised hand. "I capitulate. Tell me how it is, won't you?"

"I knew the man at No. 11. His tenancy isn't really up till March, but he got an appointment in the north and had to go. His two unexpired months weren't worth troubling about, so I got him to sublet the flat to me—all quite regularly—for a nominal consideration, and not to mention it."

"But he gave up the keys?"

"No. He left them in the door and the porter took them away. Very unwarrantable of him; surely I can keep my keys where I like? However, as I had another. . . . Really, Mr. Carrados, you hardly imagine that unless I had an

absolute right to be there I should penetrate into a flat, tamper with the gas and water, knock the place about, tramp up and down——"

"I go," said Carrados, "to get our people out in haste. Good-night."

"Good-night, Mr. Carrados. It's been a great privilege to meet you. Sorry I can't persuade you . . ."

F. A. M. Webster

THE SECRET OF THE SINGULAR CIPHER

from Old Ebbie Returns

Chapman & Hall, 1925

Permission to reprint is granted by the author

Modern murders are merely disgusting." The exclamation burst involuntarily from my lips, as I threw down the morning paper. I had been reading the account of a more than usually revolting case, in which the murderer, a married man, had killed a wretched girl, who had trusted to him and whose condition would have made it awkward for him to face the consequences of their infatuation without breaking up his normal home life.

Old Ebbie regarded me with a quizzical smile. It was evident that he had already studied the column which had attracted my interest.

"I fancy that case cuts deeper than you imagine," he said. "Later on it will undoubtedly transpire that the man was in financial difficulties and had exhausted the resources of the girl he killed. You may remember that he was already in touch with another young woman, who had money of her own, even before he had disposed of the body of his first victim."

"All that you say may be perfectly true," I argued, "but it does not alter the fact that those elements of mystery and unexpected motive, such as came to light in the case of The Man Who Sold Jewels, have been lacking from the affairs which have come our way of late."

Before my companion could answer, the telephone bell rang sharply from the hall. A moment later Jenkin entered the room.

"Inspector Wilson would like to speak to you on the telephone, sir."

Old Ebbie's smile broadened as he left the room.

"Get your hat and coat, Hicks," he called presently; "there's a job for us in Mayfair."

At the entrance to Bulstrode Mansions a big constable received us.

"The inspector will be pleased if you will go up to No. 16, gentlemen," he said.

We found our old friend Wilson seated at a small table in the dining-room,

tapping his teeth with the butt end of his pencil and staring at a queer assortment of odds and ends. A note-book was open before him. In the corner of the room was a sinister-looking shape covered with a sheet. A number of playing-cards was scattered across the dinner-table, and there was an empty glass beside a half-empty decanter of whisky.

"Good of you to come along so promptly," he greeted us. "I was just cataloguing the contents of the dead man's pockets."

"Anything interesting?" queried Old Ebbie.

"Oh, I don't know. At first sight the whole case looks clear enough. And yet there are one or two unusual features. The tenant of this flat is a fellow called Gilmour; he seems to have arrived from abroad a few months back, but nothing whatever is known of his antecedents or present business in England. Judging from his name, I should say the dead man, Christiernsson, was a Swede."

"If you know his name the Swedish Consulate ought to be able to help you."

"Yes, if Christiernsson really is his name."

"Why the doubt?"

Wilson stroked his chin reflectively. "Well, you see, the tenant of No. 17, across the landing, who called himself Humphries, committed suicide a week ago with a shot-gun; which, it is true, rendered his face pretty well unrecognisable, and now a dead man, who has not been dead more than twelve hours, turns up here in Gilmour's flat with a knife struck through his heart."

"But why the confusion about the names?" asked Ebbie.

"The caretaker is prepared to swear that the man over there under the sheet is Humphries, but just take a look at his visiting-cards."

He picked up a small silver card-case from among the odds and ends on the table and handed it to Ebbie. Each card bore the fantastic inscription, "Linka Dobrowolski Christiernsson." Old Ebbie slipped one into his pocket before handing back the card-case.

"Well, let me hear your theory," he said.

The inspector indicated the whole room with a comprehensive gesture of his hand.

"You see the playing-cards," he said, "the empty glass and the half-empty decanter, the contents of which I will have analysed as soon as possible. Doesn't it occur to you that Gilmour lured Humphries, or Christiernsson, or whatever his name was, here, fleeced him—perhaps drugged him—and then made an end of him?"

"Humph, and where is the man with the many names supposed to have hidden himself during the week that has gone?"

"Ah, there you have me!" admitted Wilson.

"I rather thought as much," smiled Ebbie. "Well, let's have a look round the place, anyway."

"But won't you examine the dead man first?"

"No, I'd rather sense the atmosphere before I see the victim."

For the best part of half an hour Ebbie prowled about the flat. He looked into linen-baskets and drawers, examined bedding and furniture, and paid particular

attention to the larder and kitchen. From time to time he shot out a trite sentence.

"Now why the deuce should a man use four sets of pyjamas and two pairs of sheets in a week?" he ejaculated, as he peered from the full linen-basket to the open laundry-book he had taken from a hook on the kitchen dresser. Or, again, "Doesn't it strike you, Wilson, that someone has been searching pretty hard for something in this flat? Surely Gilmour wouldn't be put to the necessity of ransacking his own place so thoroughly?"

"That's as may be," replied Wilson bluntly; "the fact remains that Gilmour has bolted."

"And since he is not here to excuse himself, he must, *ipso facto*, be held to accuse himself, eh?"

Ebbie crossed the room and pulled back the sheet which covered the body. The countenance was serenely calm and there was not the slightest sign that a struggle had taken place. Ebbie opened the man's coat, vest, and shirt and scrutinised the wound.

"Whoever did this deed held the knife flat on the palm of his hand and thrust it forward," he said. "Englishmen never use a knife that way and seldom kill a man in cold blood with steel; any criminologist will tell you that."

He examined the dead man's features with close attention.

"This fellow," he said, "was neither Tcheco-Slovakian, Pole, nor Swede."

"Why the mix-up of nationalities?" asked Wilson.

Ebbie brought the visiting-card out of his pocket.

"All these three names are surnames," he said. "Linka is Tcheco-Slovakian, Dobrowolski is Polish, and, as you yourself pointed out, Christiernsson is Swedish. Now let us see if we can find what the murderer wanted so badly and which we can only hope he failed to secure."

Through and through that flat we hunted, long after the body had been removed. When every possible hiding place had been exhausted Old Ebbie turned his attention to the very food in the larder and there, in the centre of a loaf of bread which I would have sworn had never been tampered with, he discovered a tiny note-book. It was filled with a jumble of apparently incoherent phrases and meaningless words.

Wilson, after one glance through the pages, made no objection to Ebbie taking charge of the book for the time being.

Twice during that night I awakened and went through into the dining-room of our flat in Victoria. My comrade was still seated at the table, the little note-book, a pencil and writing-pad were before him and all the floor was littered with sheets of paper, upon which he had inscribed figures and characters which to me appeared to have no meaning.

Once he looked up and spoke to me.

"I reckon Humphries, or whatever his name was, knew that he was near his end when he hid his note-book in the loaf," he said, "and the careful way he did it proves that he wasn't hurried. I've been all night working on every sort of

possible and impossible cipher. I fancy this case would come a whole lot clearer if we could understand what is written in the pages of this note-book."

"Perhaps Humphries had a drink and played patience with those cards we saw on the table, to help keep his nerves steady, while he waited," I suggested.

Ebbie turned that over in his mind for some moments before he spoke.

"No, I don't think Humphries drank the whisky," he said, at last; "but you've set me thinking about those cards. Did you notice there were no ash-trays on the table and no tobacco ash on the carpet or in the hearth? There was a cigarette-case in the dead man's pocket, and his nicotine-stained fingers testify that he was a heavy smoker. I fancy he'd have smoked had he played cards with Gilmour, or even by himself."

At breakfast-time Wilson arrived.

"By gad, Mr. Entwistle," he exclaimed; "this business is getting devilish deep and sinister. We have traced Gilmour to Paddington; he left there, dressed in rough clothing, by the five o'clock train yesterday morning. Last night he hid in a Portsmouth doss-house. When the police went there this morning, they learned that there had been a most unholy fight in the night, and that the man who had shared Gilmour's room was dead; they thought it was Gilmour at first; because, by some chance, he had changed beds with the other fellow, who was knifed."

"That strikes me as being very significant," said Old Ebbie. "And what became of Gilmour?"

"He's vanished again. We don't think he could have got aboard a ship, but a motor-cycle has been stolen, and we are hoping to catch him somewhere out on the open moors."

"I'd dearly like a few words with him when he does turn up," said Old Ebbie. "In the meantime, I think you are barking up the wrong tree, Wilson, if you imagine that Gilmour did the murder. Everything I have seen so far points to the fact that he had probably given Humphries, *alias* Christiernsson, shelter since the night upon which the former is supposed to have committed suicide."

"But why on earth should the man wish to practise such a deception?" I interrupted.

"I fancy friend Humphries was pretty hard pressed; he probably had a secret that certain people were anxious to prevent him from passing on. Of course, the suicide would provide a perfect blind. No doubt he hoped that his persecutors would believe they had scared him into doing it."

"But surely it would be very difficult to arrange?"

"Difficult, yes, but not impossible. Have you forgotten the Bouverie Case, and our visit to the Surrey side of the Thames? I showed you then how easily a dead body can be procured, if you know how to go about it."

"Come out into the open, Mr. Entwistle," invited the inspector. "What's at the back of your mind?"

"I hate to theorise," Old Ebbie answered, "but, for once in a way, I'm willing to humour you. My own feeling is that Humphries, or Christiernsson, was up against some secret force, and that, having arranged his own apparent death, he

either went to Gilmour for shelter, or the latter stumbled into the business and offered him protection, or at any rate a hiding place. Gilmour, of course, continued to go out and about in the normal way, while his strange guest lay hid. One night, I fancy, Gilmour came home to his flat and found Humphries dead on the floor, and evident signs that the whole place had been pretty thoroughly searched. He must then have found himself in a remarkably awkward situation. He would see at once that, with all due deference to you, Wilson, no C.I.D. man would believe his fantastic story. He may, therefore, have cleared out to avoid arrest. On the other hand, I have a sort of feeling that he probably knew something of the causes that led up to Humphries' murder, and he would, equally of course, appreciate how dangerous was the knowledge he had acquired."

"And those playing-cards on the table, and the empty whisky glass?"

"I fancy Gilmour would have needed a peg to steady his nerves after the shock of finding the dead body; but I frankly admit that I do not at present see the significance of the cards scattered all over the table. I'm certain someone left them there for a specific purpose. What that purpose was we should probably know if we could find the key to the pages of that little note-book that was hidden in the loaf of bread."

Wilson hesitated a moment.

"I'm bound to admit," he said, "that the bottom has rather fallen out of the fleecing theory. I've got on to Gilmour's bankers, through the owners of Bulstrode Mansions, and it seems that he is, comparatively speaking, a rich man."

"Good," answered Ebbie. "By the way, can you furnish me with a photograph of Humphries?"

"A post-mortem one," said Wilson; "we had it taken to compare with others in the Black Museum."

"And you could not find its counterpart, eh?"

"No; neither his features nor his finger-prints are recorded with us."

"Let me have a copy of the portrait," said Ebbie, "perhaps I may have better luck."

When the picture came he studied it for a long time.

"You'd hardly believe that chap was dead," he said at last. "Just look at those eyes, Hicks. Is it only my imagination, or is there in them the light of the certain knowledge of success? By heavens, there's something about this little fellow's face that appeals enormously to me."

Next morning, as we walked down to the Foreign Office, my companion dropped his hand on my arm.

"We're going to try a very long shot in the dark, my friend," he said; "but, as you ought to know by this time, no chance is so small that one can afford to overlook it. I was up at Bulstrode Mansions again last night; the porter tells me some queer, foreign-looking customers have been trying to get permission to look over Gilmour's flat, and he is half inclined to think that an attempt was made to force the lock yesterday afternoon when he was off duty."

At the Foreign Office Lord Arlen of Ashurst granted us an immediate inter-

view. He listened attentively to all that Old Ebbie had to say, then touched a bell.

"This is a bit out of my depth, Mr. Entwistle," he said, as we waited; "but I fancy the Permanent Secretary will be very glad to have a chat with you."

Sir Claude Ducane made no effort to conceal his interest. At the sight of the photograph which Ebbie laid down on the table a gasp escaped him.

"This man was one of the best of our Secret Service agents," he said. "You say he is dead? We had lost sight of him for months. His one bad fault was that he would always work alone. More often than not he found things out, but he never let us have a hint of what was going on until he had the whole thing cut and dried and ready to place before us complete in every detail. God alone knows what he was after this time; but, as you say, I very much doubt if Gilmour killed him."

"Do you happen to have the key to the cipher he used, Sir Claude?"

"No, that was another of his mysteries. He absolutely refused to employ any of the conventional ciphers, or to give us the key to the one he had himself invented."

"But surely he must have foreseen the possibility of just such a tragedy as has occurred?"

"He most certainly did. In fact, he told me more than once that if ever he was caught out before he could communicate with us he would leave a hint, that any clever man could read, as to the key to the cipher. But why do you ask?"

Old Ebbie produced the little note-book and laid it on the table beside the photograph. For a while the Permanent Secretary turned over the pages before handing the book back with a hopeless gesture.

"I can make absolutely nothing of it," he said.

That night, as Old Ebbie sat poring over the pages of the note-book, and covering sheet after sheet of notepaper with figures, I suddenly interrupted him.

"Do you know, Ebbie," I said, "I can't get out of my mind the picture of that poor devil sitting there in the silent flat, terrified to go outside to meet his fate, but yet man enough to play a game of patience while death stole nearer to him step by step."

"How the devil do you know he did play patience?" asked Old Ebbie, thoroughly irritated by my thoughtless interruption of his work.

"Well, what on earth else did he put the cards on the table for?" I answered with equal acerbity.

Old Ebbie got slowly to his feet, staring at me with fascinated eyes.

"What else did he put the cards on the table for?" he repeated very slowly, and his hand stole up to his waistcoat pocket, from which he withdrew Christiernsson's visiting-card. "Lord, what a blind fool I've been! And now, for goodness sake, Hicks, stop chattering. I've got some hard thinking and ciphering to do."

Upon this very pointed hint I left him and took myself off to bed. About four o'clock in the morning he awakened me. By the light of the candle he carried I saw that his eyes were blazing with excitement.

"Come into the dining-room," he said eagerly. "I've just about got this business straightened out at last."

"Do you mean that you've found the key to the cipher?" I asked eagerly.

"Well, I think you found it," he answered; "but I've worked it out. You kept on harping on about the playing-cards on the table, and that set me thinking of the visiting-cards in the silver case. I remembered what Sir Claude had told us about Humphries having promised to leave a clue that a clever man could follow; but, somehow, I couldn't envisage your picture of the poor chap playing patience. Then, again, the three names on the visiting-card neither hung together, because they are all surnames belonging to different nationalities, nor seemed to fit the dead man. We knew, indeed, from Sir Claude that they were not his. I began to wonder if they were the key to the cipher. It looked likely, but the letters in those three names number thirty, and there are only twenty-six letters in the English alphabet. On the other hand, it did not appear likely that so subtle a fellow as the dead Humphries would be satisfied with a simple, corresponding alphabetical-numerical cipher.

"For hours on end I puzzled over the orthographical aspect of the business. I was pretty well sure that the grammar of letters wasn't going to help me very much; so I turned my attention to the grammar of sounds. It struck me quite suddenly that the vowels are five in number, and the consonants twenty-five, the latter divided roughly into eleven mutes and fourteen spirants. If you look at this paper, you will see how I have set out the three names which are engraved on the visiting card.

L – a
I – e
N – i
K – o
A – u

D – g
O – j
B – d
R – b
O – k
W – ch (as in church)
O – t
L – p
S – ng
K – n
I – m

C – y
H – zh
R – z
I – th (as in bathe)
S – v
T – w
I – h
E – sh
R – s
N – th (as in bath)
S – f
S – wh
O – r
N – l

"It took a bit of working out, but finally I got at it by grading the mutes into flat, sharp, and nasal sounds, and the spirants into flat, sharp, and trilled sounds. Even so, deciphering the writing in the note-book was a terrible job, because the same letters occur several times in the code words; but the difficulty was not insuperable, only laborious; one had to leave blanks and try all possible corresponding letters to get the complete words."

So far his keen eyes had shone with the artist's joy of accomplishment, but now they took on a haunted, desperate look.

"The Bolsheviks are at the back of this business, Hicks," he said. "There is a plot to wreck the big power station at Alton Heath, thereby creating more unemployment and stirring up further trouble among the labouring classes. There is also mention of a plan to dispose of the people's leader, in such a way that it must inevitably appear that the assassination was planned in a high quarter.

"You may quite well argue that the plant and the man can be protected, and that, in any case, no one would believe that MacReady had been deliberately put out of the way at the instigation of the leaders of the accredited government; but the notes make no mention of the dates upon which these tragedies are to occur. Nor is there any indication of the names or whereabouts of the real conspirators. We may save the power station and MacReady, but what guarantee is there that, even if we prevent these disasters, more serious measures will not be taken against us?"

"Yes, I see all that," I answered, "and you will, of course, hand over this information to Scotland Yard and the Foreign Office; but it still does not account for the disappearance of Gilmour."

"No," agreed Old Ebbie. "I'm very anxious to meet that young gentleman. I fancy he must be a pretty far-seeing sort of person. He may, as I suggested to Wilson, have bolted in a panic when he realised that, firstly, no police official would believe what, on the face of it, must have appeared a highly improbable story, and, secondly, he undoubtedly shared some of the dead Secret Service man's knowledge. He would, therefore, be well aware that his life is in danger at the hands of the men who did not hesitate to kill Humphries and who, I shrewdly suspect, tried to do away with Gilmour himself in the Portsmouth doss-house to which he fled.

"If we can find Gilmour I rather fancy we shall get those missing dates we want; and it's just possible he may be able also to tell us something about the people who are at the back of this hellish plot. Anyway, we'll lodge such information as we have in the right quarters and then get down to Portsmouth. We may be able to pick up his trail. If my deductions are correct he will not have left the country."

The owner of the Portsmouth doss-house turned out to be an old chanty man, who had sailed the Seven Seas when wind-jammers were in fashion; and a very shrewd old fellow he proved himself to be.

"The man who was here the night of the big fight, when Jake was killed; what sort of a man was he, you ask? Well, I'd say just an or'nary sailorman, sir. A gentleman? No, not by any manner of means; just an or'nary fo'castle sort of fellow, such as I've sailed with hundreds an' hundreds o' voyages."

"Humph," growled Old Ebbie, "we're up against a pretty tough proposition. I'll bet you this chap Gilmour knows all about camouflage and has hunted big game more than half his life. According to what that old sailorman said he hasn't bothered to change his appearance, only his circumstances. He's literally faded into his new atmosphere, just as a wild creature fades into its natural back-

ground. If we do find him you'll see that he is not playing his assumed part, he'll be actually living it. Do you see what I mean? The real secret of disguise is not make-up or anything of that sort, but the ability to convince yourself that you actually are, for the time being, what you wish other people to take you for. This chap won't slip up anywhere, and I can tell you that it is going to be devilish hard to find him. Personally I'm going to keep my eyes skinned for the opposition, they probably know more than we do and may lead us to our man."

For the next week we hung around Portsmouth, hired a motor-car and journeyed farther afield; but had no luck at all. Then, by a strange chance, we heard of some curious happenings over Devon way. The whole story was so unusual that a local correspondent had sent it up to one of the London papers, and the editor had given it a paragraph and a catchy headline.

It appeared that a tramp had come to the back door of a moorland farm and had begged a night's shelter. He had, however, offered to pay for his supper. The farmer was away from home, but his wife had given the man a jug of cider, half a loaf and some cheese, and had told him that he might sleep in an empty hayloft. Half-way through the night the woman was awakened by a terrific explosion and had rushed to the window to discover the barn where the tramp had slept going up to the sky in lurid flames.

"It's another long shot," said Old Ebbie, as he handed me the paper, "but that reads to me remarkably as though our man had transferred himself to Devonshire."

The car we were using was a big, powerful Bentley, which would make short work of the distance. Before we started Ebbie sent a wire to Wilson.

At Moretonhampstead, close to the farm-house where the barn had been destroyed, it seemed to me that we were at last getting on to a fairly hot trail.

The landlord joined us in a glass of punch after supper and Old Ebbie handled him admirably.

"I see from the papers you've had quite a sensation in these parts," said my comrade.

"So a lot of volks seems to think," answered the old fellow, as he treated us to a shrewd stare.

"Um! Half the town's been out to see the farm, I suppose," said Ebbie.

"Oh that, that's nuthin'. It's the likes of you vurriners that comes pryin' an' questionin' that we'm don't like," said the landlord.

"We're not asking questions, my good man," said Ebbie indifferently. "I happened to read about the explosion in the morning paper and naturally thought the matter, being of a purely local nature, would interest you."

"Aye, an' a lot of other volks besides, seemin'ly," grumbled the innkeeper. "Girt big car cooms here to-day and a rare vine lot of questions I did have to answer before I could satisfy the gentlemen. Real vurriners they were, I raickon, an' no Englishmen at all, by that some token."

"I think," said Old Ebbie to me, as we sought our rooms that night, "that we will go to the high beacons to-morrow morning, taking with us our field-glasses. I wonder what sort of a car our host's 'vurriners' were driving."

"That should be easy enough to ascertain," I answered, and so it proved.

Soon after dawn Old Ebbie roused me out, and long before breakfast-time we were hidden on a high hill, with our own car safe from observation in a sheltered glen. Our glasses paralleled the landscape; but for a long time no sign of human movement was to be seen. Then suddenly we sighted a solitary man moving, as much in cover as possible, across the moorland. Presently a row of widely-separated figures, spaced for all the world like game-beaters, appeared above the horizon of a far ridge, approaching also in our direction.

Old Ebbie shut his glasses with a snap.

"If that is our man and he follows his present route," he said, "he will reach us before the hunt overtakes him."

For myself, I lay flat on my stomach, with the binoculars screwed to my eyes and an ever-increasing thrill of excitement running through me. At last Old Ebbie dropped his hand on my shoulder.

"Slip down and get the engine running," he said. "Turn the car round ready to break for the open road as soon as I've got Gilmour."

Another quarter of an hour passed before I heard them stumbling down the hillside towards me. At the same moment a shout rang out from the crest of the tor, followed quickly by the sharp whip of a revolver shot, but the range was extreme, and no whine of a passing bullet followed.

For a second the rough-looking fellow clad in home-spun hesitated.

"You've got to take us on trust, Mr. Gilmour," said Old Ebbie. "If you won't do that, then your attentive friends on the sky-line are bound to get you, and I fancy the information you have is going to be pretty badly needed at Scotland Yard."

With a weary gesture the man climbed into the back seat, followed by Ebbie, and I opened up my throttle. The great car leaped forward, just as the pursuit came pouring down the hill.

Next day we found ourselves once more in Sir Claude Ducane's luxurious office, where Inspector Wilson and the Permanent Secretary were eagerly awaiting us, but long before that Gilmour had told us his story.

"I got your wires, Mr. Entwistle," the inspector greeted us; "the second one set things buzzing, and we caught the whole bunch as they were making for the coast. Bolsheviks they were, and I fancy that what Mr. Gilmour is going to tell us will serve to keep them out of mischief for some time to come. Can you tell us, sir, who actually committed the murder at your flat?"

"I'm afraid not," Gilmour answered. "Mr. Entwistle has told me his theories, and all I can do is to confirm them. It is true that I did shelter poor Humphries, but he told me very little of what was going on. I knew that he was in great danger; I had, moreover, caught a glimpse of the ruffians who were hanging around the mansions, and I knew that some terrible thing was planned for the end of the month.

"When I came home that night and found Humphries dead, and myself likely to be arrested for his murder, I made up my mind to get on the track of those fellows and to find out what was going forward. I found their headquarters in the

very heart of the most desolate part of Devon. I got the fullest sort of proofs necessary. Here they are." He threw a wallet on the table. "But when I tried to break back for London I found myself ringed in whichever way I tried to get out, and I'm convinced they'd have got me and settled me but for the luck of Mr. Entwistle being there to pull me out yesterday morning."

"Luck, eh?" muttered Wilson beneath his breath. "I only wish I'd got half his sort of luck!"

C. E. Bechhofer Roberts

THE ENGLISH FILTER

from The Strand Magazine, 1926

Permission to reprint is granted by the author

I am unlikely ever to forget the visit that my friend, A. B. C. Hawkes, the scientist, and I paid to Rome. "A. B. C.," as I always call him, had let only one man know we were coming—his old acquaintance, Professor Castagni, the bacteriologist. We were astonished, therefore, to find at least a hundred people awaiting us at the station.

Castagni introduced many of them, a lengthy business, and I was amused to discover that his instinctive Italian love of pageantry had apparently caused him to marshal representatives of every branch of learning in the city. I found myself, for example, walking to the hotel with an elderly historian on one side, who knew a little French and less English, and delivered himself of an uninterrupted flow of words in both languages, while at the other ear was a still older professor of philosophy who spoke only Italian—of which tongue I am ignorant, although this did not seem to prevent his addressing me in it.

Hawkes, in the inevitable grey frock-coat and sponge-bag trousers, with a rose in his buttonhole, was submerged in an excited crowd, from whom there arose a Babel of welcome and congratulation. Our arrival was a comic triumph.

The moment we reached our hotel, however, they all bowed, shook our hands, and withdrew.

"What a nerve-racking experience, A. B. C.," I commented, as my friend and I reached our rooms.

"And, of course, the one man I do want to meet wasn't there," Hawkes replied.

I asked who this was.

"Ribotta, the physicist," A. B. C. said. "He must be an old man now, and, I confess, I had never rated him very highly. But just lately he's published some really very remarkable papers on atomic magnetism. How he's managed to make

up fifty years leeway in his work, I don't pretend to know. But that is what I've come to Rome to find out."

There was a tap at the door, and a young Italian entered.

"My name is Dorsi, Professor Castagni's assistant," he said in perfect English. "The professor wishes me to act as your guide here in Rome."

"That is most kind of you both," said Hawkes with assumed gratification. "But really, I mustn't trouble you."

"It is truly a pleasure. I appreciate the honour of coming into contact with so famous a man of science. Of course, if you wish to rest now after your journey, I will wait for you downstairs."

A. B. C. smiled resignedly.

"What my friend Johnstone and I really want," he said, "is an early lunch. I see it's just twelve—perhaps we may indulge our appetites. You will lunch with us, Mr. Dorsi, I trust?"

Our guest proved a sympathetic and intelligent young man. Educated partly in England, he had a sound knowledge of our language and tastes. I could see that Hawkes liked him as well as I did.

"Now, Mr. Dorsi," said A. B. C., as the waiter served the coffee and we lit our cigars. "You tell me that I may expect to be able to pay my formal call on Professor Castagni at three o'clock. Right! The only other visit I am anxious to make is to Professor Ribotta. His latest work interests me profoundly."

"That will be very simple," said Dorsi. "If you like, we can go there now—he is sure to be in his laboratory. And while you are there, gentlemen, I should advise you to talk to his assistant as well."

"You are trying to tell me something," remarked A. B. C., with a shrewd glance.

The Italian smiled.

"The facts are these, professor," he commenced.

"Holy Darwin! Don't call me 'professor'!" cried A. B. C. "Anything but that! The word suggests all the academic foibles I most detest—vanity, pedantry, untidiness, petty jealousies, and tyranny!"

"You must excuse this outburst, Mr. Dorsi," I laughed. "It is a form of address that always rouses his tempestuous nature."

Dorsi stole a humorous glance at the scientist's flaming red hair and smiled more broadly.

"Well, then, Mr. Hawkes," he began again—("That's better!" murmured A. B. C.)—"I am perhaps being indiscreet, but your time is too valuable to be wasted. Professor Ribotta—I emphasise the title in this case—is not responsible for the theories you speak of. He takes the credit for them, but it is due to his assistant, Mr. Lavorello. You know the stupid system we have in our Continental universities—promotion goes by seniority, and a position may be held for life, or at least to a very advanced age, by any old man who does not wish to retire on a pension. That is the case of Professor Ribotta. He holds a chair for which, however well he may have filled it thirty years ago, he is to-day quite unqualified.

You will see this for yourselves. But Lavorello—ah, there is a young man of the first quality, an experimenter without rival in all Italy, a scientific genius."

"I have heard of such cases before," said A. B. C. "I shall make a point of getting into touch with him. Thank you for your friendly advice. Shall we be going?"

The three of us set out for Ribotta's laboratory, which we found in an old part of the city, near the Pantheon. The entrance was remote from the main portion of the institute, and Dorsi told us that it led to Ribotta's and his assistant's rooms only.

The porter inside took off his cap to us and led us into a small room which, Dorsi told me, was the preserve of the laboratory attendant. It was dark and confined; the remains of a meal lay on the table and a couple of dirty overalls hung on a hook on the wall.

We stopped before another door, on which the porter knocked.

It was opened to us by Ribotta himself, to whom Dorsi swiftly explained who we were. The professor, an old man with a flowing beard and piercing eyes, then invited us to enter. He greeted A. B. C. effusively, led us to his desk, and motioned to us to sit down. He leaned forward in his chair, holding a hand to his ear.

"You speak not Italian, I think, Professor Hawkes?" he said in a broken English that I shall not attempt to reproduce exactly. "You do? Well, no matter; I prefer to speak English. Oh, I am very fond of England. Forty years ago I was at Cambridge under your great professors." He mentioned some famous names. "They taught me much—but I see you are too young to know them. I have not been in England since then, but I still have my great love for English things. I have many beautiful English things in my laboratory. I will call my assistant; he shall show them to you. Lavorello! Lavorello! Ah, he does not hear me. No matter, I will send the attendant to him. Carlo!" he called.

"That wretched attendant," the garrulous old man went on, "I cannot make him obey me. He attends only to Mr. Lavorello's work; he leaves my laboratory dirty. When he comes, he will hear from me. And now I will call my assistant myself."

He pounded on a door at the other side of the room. We heard a chair pushed back and the slamming of a door. Through an unglazed, barred window that gave on to a corridor—apparently the only ventilation of the room, for all the other windows were tightly closed—we saw a man pass.

Ribotta tittered. "You think it odd, perhaps," he said. "My assistant is in the next room, but he cannot come in through the connecting door. Ah, this is done on purpose. I do not want anybody to come into the room. So I locked that door twenty years ago, and it has remained locked ever since. He must come in the way you came, the only entrance. And that has a Yale lock, so that nobody can come in except myself and the attendant, unless I let them in myself. Only he and I have keys. Even the porter I never allow to enter. I want quiet, and in this way I get it. Ah, there must be Lavorello!"

He motioned to Dorsi, and our guide slipped across to unfasten the door. A

young man entered, keen and dark, but very fleshy for his age—a point, we afterwards discovered, on which he was rather sensitive. I looked at him with interest, for he was the brilliant youth whose work had brought Hawkes to Rome.

"Sit down, Lavorello, sit down," cried Ribotta. "But no, I want you to show my English guests the great things that have come here from their country. First give them a glass of water from my filter."

Without a word the young man went over to a large glass tank, uncovered at the top and with some kind of filter and tap attached. It was one of the most noticeable objects in the peculiarly bare room. He filled a glass from it and brought this to us. Ribotta held it under Hawkes's nose.

"Taste!" he said. "What beautiful clear water! Rome water is not good to drink, but out of my English filter—ah, then one may drink with pleasure and safety. Lavorello, empty this ash-tray and give me some matches!"

Expressionless Lavorello obeyed. Then Ribotta told him to get the cigars out of a drawer, and the old man offered them to A. B. C., Dorsi, and me—we refused them—and lit one of the rank things himself. He did not trouble to offer one to Lavorello, I noticed.

"Now you have seen the filter," he rattled on. "Next you must see the English microscope. Lavorello, bring the miscroscope and show it to Professor Hawkes."

It was, even as I could see, a very ordinary piece of laboratory apparatus, but the old man gloated over it as if it were a marvel.

"Very interesting indeed," murmured A. B. C.; "but have you any new results in your work on magnetism, sir?"

"No, I have not them here at the moment. I do not make the experiments myself these days; I leave them to the young men. Lavorello will show you them in his laboratory. It is good work—I showed him how it should be done. The brains are mine; the hand is his. That is how it should be, is it not?"

For politeness' sake, we agreed.

"Do have another glass of water, Professor Hawkes. No? Ah, but it is good, thanks to my English filter. Your friend, then? Oh, you must! Lavorello, bring another glass of water! Quickly! If you drank more of this water, Lavorello, you would not be so fat! There is no water like this in Rome."

It tasted to me like any other water, but I thought it incumbent on me to express loud admiration.

"We must not take up any more of your time, sir," said Hawkes, rising from his chair. "With your permission, we shall just glance at Mr. Lavorello's work, and then we must be going away."

"Delighted to have seen you, professor," said Ribotta, shaking our hands. "I am always glad to welcome foreign scientists to my laboratory, especially from England. Lavorello, you are to show these gentlemen your work—*our* work—so that they may see that we old men can still keep pace with the young. Ah, but first give me some more matches."

As we left the laboratory through the little ante-room, the attendant hurried in. He was, I noticed, a sinister-looking fellow, the sort of man one would instinctively avoid on a dark night. He went past us into the professor's room, the

door of which he opened with his pass-key, and we heard the old man greet him with a storm of angry words.

The corridor led us round towards Lavorello's room. Dorsi in a whisper called my attention to the cupboards and bookcases that were placed against the doors leading to the rest of the building—another example of Ribotta's insistence upon isolation. As we passed the barred window, we saw the attendant standing by the desk, gazing at the professor with a malicious glance. The old man was shouting and gesticulating, but, as he heard us go by, he turned and waved.

We reached Lavorello's laboratory, the whole atmosphere of which was very different from the old professor's, and A. B. C. and he were soon bent in eager interest over note-books and curves, with an occasional reference to some proof-sheets that lay on the table.

They forgot all about Dorsi and myself. The subject was far beyond either of us and we passed the time chatting.

"It's pretty clear," Dorsi said, after a long and bitter attack upon the old man in the next room, "with whom Mr. Hawkes finds himself more at home."

I sympathised with his denunciation of Ribotta's selfishness, his ridiculous pride in the very ordinary filter and microscope, and his bullying treatment of Lavorello, but, as a stranger, I thought it best not to be drawn into the expression of an opinion, and I looked round for an opportunity to change the subject.

"Hallo," I said, thankfully, "here is something I do understand a little about."

I walked over to a cabinet in the corner of the room, in which were ranged objects that I recognised as Italian and Greek-Italian antiques. There were coins and little statuettes and rings and toys and other trifles.

Lavorello happened to see us gazing at his collection. He smiled and unlocked the door of the cabinet.

"A hobby of mine," he said to me. "My country—I am a Sicilian, you know—is especially rich in such things."

"What are these?" asked Dorsi, pointing to some small white objects, which were familiar enough to me.

"Knucklebones," answered Lavorello, "with which I suppose our ancestors used to play. The queer glasses behind them are for another game, *cottabos;* and those square things on the same shelf are *tesseræ*, the counterparts of modern dice."

A. B. C. called him back to the papers and Dorsi and I discussed the customs of the ancients and their survivals in modern times.

It was a long time before Hawkes was ready to leave. Then the three of us took leave of Lavorello and tip-toed along the corridor so as not to attract Ribotta's attention, for we had no desire to be called in to hear another harangue. We glanced in through the barred opening, and saw him at his desk, with his beloved filter beyond him underneath the clock. Fortunately he was absorbed in a newspaper and did not notice us pass.

"Shades of Cavendish!" whispered A. B. C. "It's three o'clock already!"

We hurried past the porter's lodge, to whose occupant the laboratory attendant was declaiming fiercely.

"The attendant's opinion of Ribotta," A. B. C. said to me when we got outside, "is not much higher than our own, I'm afraid. If my knowledge of Italian, or at least of the Roman dialect, is not in error, he was expressing a wish that the old professor might be devoured by hungry wolves. He added that, if they or some similar agents of destiny did not perform this necessary action, he himself would have to attend to it. I must confess, after comparing Ribotta's and Lavorello's capacity, I have some sympathy with the attendant's desire."

"Lavorello is a good man, is he?" I said.

"First-rate," said my friend. "A brilliant, ingenious brain with a magnificent grasp of scientific possibilities! If he has a fault, it's a tendency to rush at conclusions, to go the short way to a result when a longer and more patient method would be more suitable. But he'll go far! It's a crying shame that he should be held back by that old charlatan. And for the latter to steal the credit of Lavorello's researches is an insult to science."

For a moment Hawkes's round, good-natured face looked quite angry, but his usual smile soon reappeared.

We made a short call on Castagni, and spent the rest of the afternoon in the Forum. Not only did we visit the usual sights there, but, as honoured guests, we were invited to view various collections and excavations not open to the general public.

For once I was able to display more knowledge than Hawkes, and, to his mock awe, I traced resemblances between some of the exhibits and various specimens I had unearthed on the more successful of my archæological expeditions in England. A. B. C. was in his element, however, with some ancient scientific instruments, and his identification of their uses has now, I understand, been officially adopted. I learned from the director of the excavations that Lavorello had performed a similar service at the time of some earlier discoveries.

We were to meet Dorsi for dinner at the "Ulpia," which he recommended as the most picturesque restaurant in the city. We found it in an ancient basilica, whose curved brick walls, arching to the roof, made a curious and sombre background for the bright napery and electric lights. The blend of old and new—so typical of Rome—was carried down to the smallest details; the lamps, for example, were fixed in amphoræ of antique form, and the menu was rolled like an old parchment scroll. The place amused us, and we settled down patiently to await our guest.

An hour after the agreed time we despaired of his arrival and decided to begin. At ten o'clock, just as we were about to leave, he came in.

"Forgive my absence," he said, "but a terrible thing has happened. Professor Ribotta has been murdered!"

"Murdered!" I exclaimed.

"He was found poisoned in his laboratory this afternoon," Dorsi went on. A pallid smile flickered on his lips as he added, "The poison was apparently administered in the filter of which he was so proud."

"Who did it?" A. B. C. asked.

"The attendant has disappeared, and the police are in search of him. The

chief of police is in the laboratory now, and, as you were among the last people to see the professor alive, he wishes to interrogate you. He was going to send to your hotel, but I volunteered to come here and fetch you."

We called for the bill and left the restaurant in silence. We walked through the warm night to the laboratory, and found it ablaze with lights. A group of men were standing in the dead man's room, among them Lavorello and the porter, both much moved.

The body had been removed to a neighbouring mortuary for examination. They told us that the professor had been found sitting upright at his desk, just as we had seen him as we tip-toed out that same afternoon. Tightly grasped in his hand was a glass of water, of which he had drunk perhaps a half; and his eyes were fixed in a rigid stare.

The chief of police asked Hawkes a string of questions, writing the replies in a note-book.

"There seems no doubt," Dorsi said to me, "that the attendant is the villain. We all heard the quarrel and the threats he uttered against the old man. He, the attendant, was seen to leave the building a few minutes after three o'clock; in fact, he did not go back into the laboratory after we left. Lavorello says that at a quarter past five, on his way out to the baths that he visits every afternoon to try to reduce his weight, he spoke to Ribotta through the barred window from the corridor. The porter confirms that Lavorello went out at that time. Now comes the important evidence: at half-past five the attendant came in—not too sober, the porter thinks, and still muttering threats against the old man—and entered his little room, through which alone, as you know, it is possible to enter this laboratory.

"He came out ten minutes later and has not been seen since. At six o'clock, twenty minutes after the attendant went away, the porter knocked on the inner door to give the professor a message. Alarmed at receiving no reply, he went round to the barred window and called to him. When he saw that the old gentleman did not move, he called some students who were passing by. They had, of course, to smash down the door to enter, and they discovered old Ribotta dead with the glass in his hand."

I was considering these facts when a stir outside was followed by the appearance of a couple of policemen with the attendant.

The villain was even more unprepossessing than before; he was both drunk and frightened.

The chief of police told him that he was suspected of causing the professor's death, and the man, moistening his parched lips, vehemently denied the charge. Ordered to account for his movements that afternoon, he said the professor had driven him past endurance and he had gone away in a temper. He thought this must have been about three o'clock.

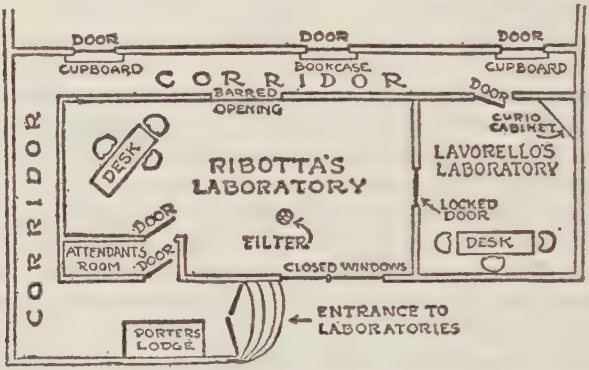
He went to a wine-shop and had some drinks and then made up his mind to go home to his village, a few miles out of the city, but on his way he remembered that he had left some personal belongings in his room and came back to fetch them. After making a parcel of them, he said, he went away again, without en-

tering the laboratory at all. Then he took the tram to his home, where the police had just arrested him.

He repeatedly denied that he had gone into the professor's laboratory during his short return. He had, he insisted, stayed in his own little room and made his parcel.

Asked whether he had not uttered threats against the professor's life earlier in the afternoon, he at first said he had not. But, confronted with the evidence of the porter and ourselves, he had to admit that in the heat of his anger he might have done so.

His account in other respects certainly tallied with the previous statements.



PLAN OF PROFESSOR RIBOTTA'S LABORATORY

But the damning facts remained that only he and the dead man had keys to the laboratory and that he had admittedly been in the ante-room between the time Ribotta was last seen alive—by Lavorello, at a quarter past five—and the time of his being found dead at six o'clock.

Suddenly the chief turned to the porter. "And you?" he said. "Did you enter the laboratory during that period?" A. B. C. interpreted all this to me.

"The professor never permitted me inside," answered the porter. "And I had no key. No one had a key, not even Signor Lavorello, except the professor and the attendant."

"Perhaps the professor opened the door to somebody else, or the murderer had provided himself with a third key?"

"Even so," was the reply, "my lodge is opposite the door of the ante-room, and I should have seen anyone enter it. Nobody did. There is no other entrance to the laboratory."

The chief went round the room examining it. As he showed us, there was indeed no other entrance than by the door from the attendant's room. The door to Lavorello's room was still bolted, and it was clear that it had not been opened. The dust on the skylight and on the windows proved that they, too, had not

been tampered with. As for the window to the corridor, the bars were firmly fixed in the mortar; a baby could not have climbed between them.

We were asked to accompany the party to the mortuary. A sheet was reverently pulled back and the dead man's face revealed. I watched the attendant. He shuddered and crossed himself surreptitiously. One might have said that his very emotion testified to his guilt.

The unnatural rigidity of the dead man's features seemed to interest Hawkes. He took a glass from his pocket and intently examined the staring eyes for some minutes. Then he entered upon a conversation with the doctors in a corner of the room, where they were working.

When the rest of us went out, glad to leave the presence of death, A. B. C. did not immediately follow. Dorsi and I waited outside, after seeing the prisoner removed, protesting violently, by the police. My friend came out at last.

"Gentlemen," he said, "you must excuse me. Johnstone, take Mr. Dorsi back to the hotel and entertain him—and Mr. Lavorello too, if he will accompany you. I am going to help with the medical examination."

"What a gruesome ideal" I said.

"My erudite friend," he replied, "you ought to know my interest in the borderline between physics and physiology. Good night." And he hurried back inside the mortuary.

We walked to the hotel, discussing the terrible event.

"I suppose," I said, "it is certain the poor man was poisoned?"

"Of that there is no doubt," said Dorsi. "The doctors suspected it from the first, and Mr. Hawkes, who seems to know everything, agrees with them. They all think it is a poison of the strychnine class, although probably not strychnine itself."

"It ought to be easy to find where the attendant procured it," I suggested.

"In England it might be," smiled Lavorello, "but not, I fear, in Rome. However, as no one but the attendant could possibly have entered and dropped it in the filter, the question where he obtained it hardly seems to matter."

"Can it possibly have been introduced through the walls or the roof or the windows?" I asked.

"Impossible," said Dorsi. "Stupid and deaf as the old man was, he was very keen-sighted, and, sitting at his desk with the filter right in front of him, he would have noticed any attempt to tamper with it. Besides, how on earth could anyone have done so, when it was in the very middle of the room?"

I had to admit that they were right.

They would not come in with me, and we parted at the entrance to my hotel. I sat in my room for some time, but I saw nothing to shake my conviction that the attendant was guilty. This seemed established beyond the possibility of doubt.

Hawkes did not return all that night, nor was he in the hotel when I left it the next morning to visit St. Peter's and one of the Vatican galleries. I lunched in a little restaurant near the Cathedral and returned to the hotel in the middle of the afternoon.

I found A. B. C. waiting for me. From his look I guessed that he had spent the whole night on his researches.

"Well, what news?" he asked.

"I look to you for that, A. B. C.," I replied. "Has the attendant confessed?"

"Not yet; but things are very black against him."

"You look tired," I said. "Why don't you lie down for a while?"

"I am a little fatigued," he admitted. "Between you and me, Ribotta dead presents more scientific interest than he did alive, but he is equally wearying in both states. I fear you will think that remark in bad taste. I don't think I'll lie down, however. What would you say to taking a Turkish bath—a Roman bath, I suppose I ought to call it here? Our full-bodied friend Lavorello patronizes the baths every afternoon, it seems, like the lover of antique Roman customs that he is, and I have arranged to visit one of them with him to-day. I hope you will accompany us."

I readily agreed, and we drove off to the laboratory and picked up Lavorello. We took the opportunity to glance in at the dead man's room, and I confirmed my impressions of the case. Nobody could possibly have entered it except through the attendant's room.

The three of us were soon in the baths enjoying the delights that Lavorello, lying on a slab near us, assured us were the daily pleasures of the ancient Romans. His admiration for my friend was so evident, and he addressed his conversation so exclusively to him, that A. B. C. seemed to fear that I was being unduly relegated to the background.

"Cease to emulate the modest violet, friend Johnstone," he smiled. "Discourse to us upon topics suitable to the occasion. An archæologist like you ought to welcome the society of a fellow-enthusiast like Mr. Lavorello—Professor Lavorello, I suppose his friends will call him now. Expound to us, my able adjutant, the pastimes of antique Roman society in the baths they frequented."

"Surely, A. B. C.," I said, "Mr. Lavorello is better qualified than I? His collection shows him to be a specialist."

"I doubt it," said Hawkes. "He has been too busy, I am sure, adequately to interest himself in the subject; is that not so, Lavorello?"

"Oh, I don't know," replied Lavorello; "I have found time in my leisure moments to study it with a certain thoroughness."

"Theory, theory, all is theory!" A. B. C. scoffed. "I'll wager for example, that you, Lavorello, couldn't tell me the right way to hold those old knucklebones that are in your cabinet."

"Surely knucklebones are played to-day pretty much as they ever were?" said the Italian. "The simplest and yet the most difficult game is to toss them one after the other in the air and to endeavour to catch the whole set—three or five—on the back of your hand. It is difficult, but after long practice I found I could do it."

"So you have joined practice to theory after all," said A. B. C. "I apologise for my unworthy doubts. Now, Johnstone, I give you one more chance to retrieve

your reputation as an archæologist. Tell me some other game that the ancients played on such occasions as these—and in such prodigious heat as this."

"That's easy," I said. "I was reminded of it yesterday. Mr. Lavorello has the instruments in his cabinet. It is the old game of *cottabos*."

"Oh, how do you play that, friend Lavorello?"

"I am afraid," replied he, laughing, "my knowledge stops short at knuckle-bones. As you hinted, I am not a universal genius."

"Now, splendid Johnstone, cover yourself with glory! Tell us how the royal and ancient game of *cottabos* was played."

"As far as I remember," I said, "the players amused themselves with it at drinking parties. The aim of the game was to throw wine from a specially-shaped glass in such a way that the liquid travelled through the air without scattering. This was done, according to German scholars, who know everything about everything, by a particular twirling movement imparted to the glass. The object was to sink a little metal saucer floating in a sunken tank by casting the wine into it. Isn't that right, Mr. Lavorello?"

Just at that moment Dorsi entered, smiling at the sight of us three in our scanty attire.

"What stifling heat!" he said. "You sent for me, Mr. Hawkes?"

"Yes," said A. B. C. "I wanted you to know that I have discovered the murderer of Professor Ribotta."

"You have?" we exclaimed, in one breath.

"I thought, sir, the police arrested him yesterday," said Dorsi.

"No, dear Dorsi, no. The attendant had no hand in the crime."

"But it was proved——" I began.

"It was proved, my intelligent compatriot, that the attendant entered the building at half-past five for a few minutes. The corpse was not discovered till six, and so it was taken for granted that the man had entered the professor's room and dropped the poison in the filter."

"Exactly," I said.

"But when I saw the corpse," A. B. C. went on, "I was struck at once by the peculiar red discoloration of the eyes. There is a certain obscure poison of the strychnine class which produces this effect. It also produces almost instantaneous death. As you know, the eye is like a camera, with the retina at the back like a sensitive plate, on which the different pictures are continually formed. Now, this poison makes the lens lose its transparency, with the result that no light enters, and the eyeball becomes like a camera with the shutter closed.

"It occurred to me, therefore, that the picture that was cast on the retina at the moment of death might have persisted. Of course, we should not perceive this picture direct. I thought, however, that it might be possible, as it were, to develop the image. The doctors agreed to allow me to try. I will not give you details of the method, for they are not particularly pleasant to hear. We were not successful with the first eye; the work was more difficult than I had suspected. But from the second I got a blurred picture—not a studio photograph, perhaps, but sufficient for our purpose. That picture told me all I wanted to know."

"What did it show?" I asked.

"Just the clock on the wall, on which, as I took the trouble to observe this afternoon, the rays of the afternoon sun fall. Now that photograph on the dead man's retina, which was the last thing he saw in this life, showed with clearness that, at the moment of his death, the hands of the clock stood at exactly five o'clock!"

"Five o'clock," cried Dorsi. "Then the attendant had not yet returned!"

"Before he came back on that unfortunate visit to his room," said A. B. C. solemnly, "the professor was already dead."

"But nobody else had entered the laboratory," I objected.

"And nobody had!" said A. B. C. "That's what made me so curious about the game of *cottabos*. You see, a really skilled player, standing in the corridor with the proper kind of glass, might well throw the poison through the barred window into the filter. It would be difficult, I admit, but a practised hand could achieve it. The professor at his desk would not notice the liquid passing across the room."

A choking sound came from the slab where Lavorello lay. He was gasping as if unable to draw his breath. A. B. C. strode across to him and spoke softly but distinctly in his ear, while Dorsi and I watched with a terrible suspicion in our minds.

"Lavorello," said Hawkes, sternly, "*you* understand!"

The young scientist groaned and fought for air. Then a sudden agitation of his body threw him off the slab on to the floor. Dorsi and I rushed to raise him, but A. B. C. waved us back.

"It's too late," he said. "I knew his heart was weak—he was foolish to use these hot rooms. The heat of the bath, the strain of his recent crime, and the knowledge that it had been detected have killed him. I must confess that this was my reason for staging this little scene here. We may now be able to avert a very nasty scandal; whereas, if it had come to a public trial—" He shook his head. "Yes, he was a great experimenter, was young Lavorello, but his ambition was too great for him. A true scientist should await results, not force them, even when a stupid, vain old man stands in the way."

E. C. Bentley

THE CLEVER COCKATOO

from The Strand Magazine, 1914

Permission to reprint is granted by the author

"Well, that's my sister," said Mrs. Lancey, in a low voice. "What do you think of her, now you've spoken to her?"

Philip Trent, newly arrived from England, stood by his hostess within the loggia of an Italian villa looking out upon a prospect of such loveliness as has enchanted and enslaved the Northern mind from age to age. Before the villa lay a long paved terrace, and by the balustrade of it a woman stood looking out over the lake and conversing with a tall, grey-haired man.

"Ten minutes is rather a short acquaintance," Trent replied. "Besides, I was attending rather more to her companion. Mynheer Scheffer is the first Dutchman I have met on social terms. One thing about Lady Bosworth is clear to me, though. She is the most beautiful thing in sight, which is saying a good deal."

Mrs. Lancey laughed.

"But I want you to take a personal interest in her, Philip; it means nothing, I know, when you talk like that. I care a great deal about Isabel; she is far more to me than any other woman. That's rather rare between sisters, I believe. And it makes me wretched to know that there's something wrong with her."

"With her health, do you mean? One wouldn't think so."

"Yes, but I fear it is that."

"Is it possible?" said Trent. "Why, Edith, the woman has the complexion of a child and the step of a racehorse and eyes like jewels. She looks like Atalanta in blue linen."

"Did Atalanta marry an Egyptian mummy?" enquired Mrs. Lancey.

"It is true," said Trent thoughtfully, "that Sir Peregrine looks rather as if he had been dug up somewhere. But I think he owes much of his professional success to that. People like a great doctor to look more or less unhealthy."

"Perhaps they do; but I don't think the doctor's wife enjoys it very much. Isabel is always happiest when away from him—if he were here now she would be quite different from what you see. You know, Philip, their marriage hasn't been a success—I always knew it wouldn't be."

Trent shrugged his shoulders.

"Let's drop the subject, Edith. Tell me why you want me to know about Lady Bosworth having something the matter with her. I'm not a physician."

"No; but there's something very puzzling about it, as you will see; and you are clever at getting at the truth about things other people don't understand. Now,

I'll tell you no more. I only want you to observe Bella particularly at dinner this evening, and tell me afterwards what you think. You'll be sitting opposite to her, between me and Agatha Stone. Now go and talk to her and the Dutchman."

"Scheffer's appearance interests me," remarked Trent. "He has a face curiously like Frederick the Great's, and yet there's a difference—he doesn't look quite as if his soul were lost for ever and ever."

"Well, go and ask him about it," suggested Mrs. Lancey.

When the party of seven sat down to dinner that evening, Lady Bosworth had just descended from her room. Trent perceived no change in her; she talked enthusiastically of the loveliness of the Italian evening, and joined in a conversation that was general and lively. It was only after some ten minutes that she fell silent, and that a new look came over her face.

Little by little all animation departed from it. Her eyes grew heavy and dull, her red lips were parted in a foolish smile, and to the high, fresh tint of her cheek there succeeded a disagreeable pallor.

All charm, all personal force had departed. It needed an effort to recall her quaint, vivacious talk of an hour ago, now that she sat looking vaguely at the table before her, and uttering occasionally a blank monosyllable in reply to the discourse that Mr. Scheffer poured into her ear. It was not, Trent told himself, that anything abnormal was done. It was the staring fact that Lady Bosworth was not herself, but someone wholly of another kind, that opened a new and unknown spring of revulsion in the recesses of his heart.

An hour later Mrs. Lancey carried Trent off to a garden-seat facing the lake.

"Well?" she said quietly.

"It's very strange, and rather ghastly," he answered, nursing his knee. "But if you hadn't told me it puzzled you, I should have thought it was easy to find an explanation."

"Drugs, you mean?" He nodded. "Of course everybody must think so. George does, I know. It's horrible!" declared Mrs. Lancey, with a thump on the arm of the seat. "Agatha Stone began hinting at it after the first few days. Gossiping cat! She loathes Isabel, and she'll spread it round everywhere that my sister is a drug-fiend. Philip, I asked her point blank if she was taking anything that could account for it. She was much offended at that; told me I had known her long enough to know she never had done and never would do such a thing. And though Isabel has her faults, she's absolutely truthful."

Trent looked on the ground. "Yes; but you may have heard——"

"Oh, I know! They say that kind of habit makes people lie and deceive who never did before. But, you see, she is so completely herself, except just at this time. I simply couldn't make up my mind to disbelieve her. And, besides, if Bella is peculiar about anything, it's clean, wholesome, hygienic living. She has every sort of carbolicky idea. She never uses scent or powder or any kind of before-and-after stuff, never puts anything on her hair; she is washing herself from morning till night, but she always uses ordinary yellow soap. She never touches anything alcoholic, or tea, or coffee. You wouldn't think she had that

kind of fad to look at her and her clothes; but she has; and I can't think of anything in the world she would despise more than dosing herself with things."

"How long has it been going on?"

"This is the seventh evening. I entreated her to see a doctor; but she hates the idea of being doctored. She says it's sure to pass off and that it doesn't make any difference to her general health. George, who has always been devoted to her, only talks to her now with an effort. Randolph Stone is just the same; and two days before you arrived the Illingsworths and Captain Burrows both went earlier than they had intended—I'm certain, because this change in Isabel was spoiling their visit for them."

"She seems to get on remarkably well with Scheffer," remarked Trent.

"I know—it's extraordinary, but he seems more struck with her than ever."

"Well, he is; but in a lizard-hearted way of his own. He and I were talking just now after you left the dining-room. He spoke of Lady Bosworth in a queer, semi-scientific sort of way, saying she was very interesting to a medical man like himself. You didn't tell me he was one."

"I didn't know. George calls him an anthropologist, and disagrees with him about the races of Farther India. It's the one thing George does know something about, having lived there twelve years governing the poor things. They took to each other at once when they met last year, and when I asked him to stay here he was quite delighted. He only begged to be allowed to bring his cockatoo, as it could not live without him."

"Strange pet for a man," Trent observed. "He was showing off its paces to me this afternoon. Well, it seems he's greatly interested in these attacks of hers. He has seen nothing quite like them. But he is convinced the thing is due to what he calls a toxic agent of some sort. As to what, or how, or why, he is absolutely at a loss."

"Mr. Scheffer really is a wonderful person," the lady said. "He's lived for years among the most appalling savages in Dutch New Guinea, doing scientific work for his Government, and according to George they treat him like a sort of god. He's most attractive and quite kind really, I think, but there's something about him that makes me afraid of him."

"What is it?"

"I think it is the frosty look in his eyes," replied Mrs. Lancey, drawing her shoulders together in a shiver.

"Perhaps that is the feeling about him in Dutch New Guinea," said Trent. "Did you tell me, Edith, that your sister began to be like this the very first evening she came here?"

"Yes. And it had never happened before, she declares."

"She came out from England with the Stones, didn't she?"

"Only the last part of the journey. They got on the train at Lucerne."

Trent looked back into the drawing-room at the wistful face of Mrs. Stone, who was playing piquet with her host. She was slight and pretty, with large, appealing eyes that never lost their melancholy, though she was always smiling.

"You say she loathes Lady Bosworth," he said. "Why?"

"Well, I suppose it's mainly Bella's own fault," confessed Mrs. Lancey, with a grimace. "You may as well know, Philip—you'll soon find out, anyhow—the truth is she *will* flirt with any man that she doesn't actively dislike. She's so brimful of life she can't hold herself in—or she won't, rather; she says there's no harm in it, and she doesn't care if there is. Several times she has practised on Randolph, and, although he's a perfectly safe old donkey if there ever was one, Agatha can't bear the sight of her."

"She seems quite friendly with her," Trent observed.

Mrs. Lancey produced through her delicate nostrils a sound that expressed a scorn for which there were no words.

"Well, what do you make of it, Philip?" his hostess asked, at length. "Myself, I simply don't know what to think. These queer fits of hers frighten me horribly. There's one dreadful idea, you see, that keeps occurring to me. Could it, perhaps, be"—Mrs. Lancey lowered her already low tone—"the beginning of insanity?"

He spoke reassuringly. "Oh, I shouldn't cherish that fancy. There are other things much more likely and much less terrible. Look here, Edith, will you try to arrange certain things for to-morrow, without asking me why? And don't let anybody know I asked you to do it—not even George. Until later on, at least. Will you?"

"How exciting!" Mrs. Lancey breathed. "Yes, of course, mystery-man. What do you want me to do?"

"Do you think you could manage things to-morrow so that you and I and Lady Bosworth could go out in the motor-boat on the lake for an hour or two in the evening, getting back in time to change for dinner—just the three of us and the engineer?"

She pondered. "Then the three of us could run down in the boat to San Marmette—it's a lovely little place—and be back before seven. In this weather it's really the best time of day for the lake."

"That would do admirably, if you could work it. And one thing more—if we do go as you suggest. I want you privately to tell your engineer to do just what I ask him to do—no matter what it is."

Mrs. Lancey worked it without difficulty. At five o'clock the two ladies and Trent, with a powerful young man of superb manners at the steering-wheel, were gliding swiftly southward, mile after mile, down the long lake. They landed at the most picturesque, and perhaps the most dilapidated and dirtiest, of all the lakeside villages, where, in the tiny square above the landing-place, a score of dusky infants were treading the measures and chanting the words of one of the immemorial games of childhood. While Mrs. Lancey and her sister watched them in delight, Trent spoke rapidly to the young engineer, whose gleaming eyes and teeth flashed understanding.

Soon afterward they strolled through San Marmette, and up the mountain road to a little church, half a mile away, where a curious fresco could be seen.

It was close on half-past six when they returned, to be met by Giuseppe, voluble in excitement and apology. It appeared that while he had been fraternis-

ing with the keeper of the inn by the landing-place certain *triste individui* had, unseen by anyone, been tampering maliciously with the engine of the boat, and had poured handfuls of dust into the delicate mechanism. Mrs. Lancey, who had received a private nod from Trent, reproved him bitterly for leaving the boat, and asked how long it would take to get the engine working again.

Giuseppe, overwhelmed with contrition, feared that it might be a matter of hours. Questioned, he said that the public steamer had arrived and departed twenty minutes since; the next one, the last of the day, was not due until after nine. Their excellencies could at least count on getting home by that, if the engine was not ready sooner. Questioned farther, he said that one could telephone from the post-office, and that food creditably cooked was to be had at the *trattoria*.

Lady Bosworth was delighted. She declared that she would not have missed this occasion for anything. She had come to approve highly of Trent, who had made himself excellent company, and she saw her way to being quite admirable, for she was in dancing spirits.

It was a more than cheerful dinner that they had under a canopy of vine-leaves on a tiny terrace overlooking the lake. Twilight came on unnoticed, and soon afterwards appeared the passenger-boat, by which, Giuseppe advising it, they decided to return. It was as they sought for places on the crowded upper deck that Mrs. Lancey put her hand on Trent's arm. "There hasn't been a sign of it all the evening," she whispered. "What does that mean?"

"It means," murmured Trent, "that Lady Bosworth was prevented, by the merest accident, from dining at home in the ordinary way."

It was not until the following afternoon that Trent found an opportunity of being alone with his hostess in the garden.

"She is perfectly delighted at having escaped it last night," said Mrs. Lancey. "She says she knew it would pass off, but she hasn't the least notion how she was cured. Nor have I."

"She isn't," replied Trent. "Last night was only a beginning, and we can't get her unexpectedly stranded for the evening every day. The next move can be made now, if you consent to it. Lady Bosworth will be out until this evening, I believe?"

"She's gone shopping in the town. What do you want to do?"

"I want you to take me up to her room, and there I want you to look very carefully through everything in the place—in every corner of every box and drawer and bag and cupboard—and show me anything you find that might—"

"I should hate to do that!" Mrs. Lancey interrupted him, her face flushing.

"You would hate much more to see your sister again this evening as she was every evening before last night. Look here, Edith; the position is simple enough. Every day, about seven, Lady Bosworth goes into that room in her normal state to dress for dinner. Every day she comes out of it apparently as she went in, but turns queer a little later. Now is there any other place than that room where the mischief could happen?"

Mrs. Lancey frowned furiously. For a few moments she stood carefully boring a hole in the gravel with one heel. Then, "Come along," she said, and led the way toward the house.

"Unless we take the floor up," said Mrs. Lancey, seating herself emphatically on the bed in her sister's room twenty minutes later, "there's nowhere else to look. I've taken everything out and pried into every hole and corner. There isn't a single lockable thing that is locked. There isn't a bottle or phial or pill-box of any sort to be found. So much for your suspicions. What interests you about that nail-polishing pad? You must have seen one before, surely."

"This ornamental design on hammered silver is very beautiful and original," replied Trent, abstractedly. "I have never seen anything quite like it."

"The same design is on the whole of the toilet-set," Mrs. Lancey observed tartly, "and it shows to least advantage on the manicure things. You are talking rubbish; and yet," she added slowly, "you are looking rather pleased with yourself."

Trent turned round slowly. "I'm only thinking. Whose are the rooms on each side of this, Edith?"

"This side, the Stones's; that side, Mr. Scheffer's."

"Then I will go for a walk all alone and think some more. Good-bye."

Trent was not in the house when, three hours later, a rousing tumult broke out on the upper floor. Those below in the loggia heard first a piercing scream, then a clatter of feet on parquet flooring, then more sounds of feet, excited voices, other screams of harsh, inhuman quality, and a lively scuffling and banging. Mr. Scheffer, with a volley of guttural words of which it was easy to gather the general sense, headed the rush of the company upstairs.

"Gisko! Gisko!" he shouted, at the head of the stairway. There was another ear-splitting screech, and the cockatoo came scuttling and fluttering out of Lady Bosworth's room, pursued by three vociferating women servants. The bird's yellow crest was erect and quivering with agitation; it screeched furious defiance again as it leapt upon its master's outstretched wrist.

"Silence, devil!" exclaimed Mr. Scheffer, seizing it by the head and shaking it violently. "I know not how to apologise, Lancey," he declared. "The accursed bird has somehow slipped from his chain away. I left him in my room secure just before we had tea."

"Never mind, never mind!" replied his host, who seemed rather pleased than otherwise with this small diversion. "I don't suppose he's done any harm beyond frightening the women. Anything wrong, Edith?" he asked, as they approached the open door of the bedroom, to which the ladies had already hurried. Lady Bosworth's maid was telling a voluble story.

"When she came in just now to get the room ready for Isabel to dress," Mrs. Lancey summarised, "she suddenly heard a voice say something, and saw the bird perched on top of the mirror, staring at her. It gave her such a shock that she dropped the water-can and fled; then the two other girls came and helped her, trying to drive it out. They hadn't the sense to send for Mr. Scheffer."

"Apologise, carrion!" commanded Gisko's master. The cockatoo uttered a string of Dutch words in a subdued croak. "He says he asks one thousand pardons, and he will sin no more," Mr. Scheffer translated. "Miserable brigand! Traitor!"

Lady Bosworth hurried out of her room.

"I won't hear the poor thing scolded like that," she protested. "How was he to know my maid would be frightened? He looks so wretched! Take him away, Mr. Scheffer, and cheer him up."

It was half an hour later that Mrs. Lancey came to her husband in his dressing-room.

"I must say Bella was very decent about Scheffer's horrid bird," she began. "Do you know what the little fiend had done?"

"No, my dear. I thought he had confined himself to frightening the maid out of her skin."

"Not at all. He had been having the time of his life. Bella saw at once that he had been up to mischief, but she pretended there was nothing. Now it turns out he has bitten the buttons off two pairs of gloves, chewed up a lot of hair-pins, and spoiled her pretty little manicure set. He's torn the lining out of the case, the silver handles are covered with beak-marks, two or three of the things he seems to have hidden somewhere, and the polishing-pad is a ruin."

"It's too bad!" declared Mr. Lancey, bending over a shoe.

"I believe you're laughing, George," said his wife coldly.

He began to do so audibly. "You must admit it's funny to think of the bird going solemnly through a programme of mischief like that. I wish I could have seen the little beggar at it. Well, we shall have to get Bella a new nail-outfit. I'm glad she held her tongue about it just now."

"Why?"

"Because, my dear, we don't ask people to the house to make them feel uncomfortable—especially foreigners."

"Bella wasn't thinking of your ideal of hospitality. She held her tongue because she's taken a fancy to Scheffer. But, George, how do you suppose the little pest got in? The window was shut, and Hignett declares the door was too, when she went to the room."

"Then I expect Hignett deceives herself. Anyway, what does it matter? What I am anxious about is your sister's little peculiarity. As I've told you, I don't at all like the look of her having been quite normal yesterday evening, the one evening when she was away from the house by accident. I really am feeling miserably depressed, Edith. What I'm dreading now is a repetition of the usual ghastly performance to-night."

But neither that night, nor any night after, was that performance repeated. Lady Bosworth, free now of all apprehension, renewed and redoubled the life of the little company. And the lips of Trent were obstinately sealed.

Three weeks later Trent was shown into the consulting-room of Sir Peregrine Bosworth. The famous physician was a tall, stooping man of exaggerated gaunt-

ness, narrow-jawed, and high-nosed. He was courteous of manner and smiled readily; but his face was set in unhappy lines.

"Will you sit down, Mr. Trent?" said Sir Peregrine. "You wrote that you wished to see me upon a private matter concerning myself. I am at a loss to imagine what it can be, but, knowing your name, I had no hesitation in making an appointment."

Trent inclined his head. "I am obliged to you, Sir Peregrine. The matter is really important, and also quite private—so private that no person whatever knows the material facts besides myself. I won't waste words. I have lately been staying with the Lanceys, whom you know, in Italy. Lady Bosworth was also a guest there. For some days before my arrival she had suffered each evening from a curious attack of lassitude and vacancy of mind. I don't know what it was. Perhaps you do."

Sir Peregrine, immovably listening, smiled grimly. "The description of symptoms is a little vague. I have heard nothing of this, I may say, from my wife."

"It always came on at a certain time of the day, and only then. That time was a few minutes after eight, at the beginning of dinner. The attack passed off gradually after two hours or so."

The physician laid his clenched hand on the table between them. "You are not a medical man, Mr. Trent, I believe. What concern have you with all this?" His voice was coldly hostile now.

"Lots," answered Trent briefly. Then he added, as Sir Peregrine got to his feet with a burning eye, "I know nothing of medicine, but I cured Lady Bosworth."

The other sat down again suddenly. His open hands fell upon the table and his dark face became very pale. "You—" he began with difficulty.

"I and no other, Sir Peregrine. And in a curiously simple way. I found out what was causing the trouble, and without her knowledge I removed it. It was—oh, the devil!" Trent exclaimed in a lower tone. For Sir Peregrine Bosworth, with a brow gone suddenly white and clammy, had first attempted to rise and then sunk forward with his head on the table.

Trent, who had seen such things before, hurried to him, pulled his chair from the table, and pressed his head down to his knees. Within a minute the stricken man was leaning back in his chair. He inspired deeply from a small bottle he had taken from his pocket.

"You have been overworking, perhaps," Trent said. "Something is wrong. I think I had better not—"

Sir Peregrine had pulled himself together. "I know very well what is wrong with me, sir," he interrupted brusquely. "It is my business to know. That will not happen again. I wish to hear what you have to say before you leave this house."

"Very well." Trent took a tone of colourless precision. "I was asked by Lady Bosworth's sister, Mrs. Lancey, to help in trying to trace the source of the disorder which attacked her every evening. I need not describe the signs of it, and I will not trouble you with an account of how I reasoned on the matter. But I found out that Lady Bosworth was, on these occasions, under the influence of a

drug, which had the effect of lowering her vitality and clogging her brain, without producing stupefaction or sleep; and I was led to the conclusion that she was administering this drug to herself without knowing it."

He paused, and felt in his waistcoat pocket. "When Mrs. Lancey and I were making a search for something of the kind in her room, my attention was caught by the fine workmanship of a manicure set on the dressing-table. I took up the little round box meant to contain nail-polishing paste, admiring its shape and decoration, and on looking inside it found it half-full of paste. But I have often watched the process of beautifying finger-nails, and it seemed to me that the stuff was of a deeper red than the usual pink confection; and I saw next that the polishing-pad of the set, though well-worn, had never been used with paste, which leaves a sort of dark incrustation on the pad. Yet it was evident that the paste in the little box had been used. It is useful, sometimes, you see, to have a mind that notices trifles. So I jumped to the conclusion that the paste that was not employed as nail-polish was employed for some other purpose; and when I reached that point I simply put the box in my pocket and went away with it. I may say that Mrs. Lancey knew nothing of this, or of what I did afterwards."

"And what was that?" Sir Peregrine appeared now to be following the story with an ironic interest.

"Naturally, knowing nothing of such matters, I took it to the place that called itself 'English Pharmacy' in the town, and asked the proprietor what the stuff was. He looked at it, took a little on his finger, smelt it, and said it was undoubtedly lip-salve.

"It was then I remembered how, when I saw Lady Bosworth during one of her attacks, her lips were brilliantly red, though all the colour had departed from her face. That had struck me as very odd, because I am a painter, and naturally I could not miss an abnormality like that. Then I remembered another thing. One evening, when Lady Bosworth, her sister, and myself were prevented from returning to the house for dinner, and dined at a country inn, there had been no signs of her trouble; but I had noticed that she moistened her lips again and again with her tongue."

"You are observant," remarked Sir Peregrine dispassionately and again had recourse to his smelling-bottle.

"You are good enough to say so," Trent replied, with a wooden face. "On thinking these things over, it seemed to me probable that Lady Bosworth was in the habit of putting on a little lip-salve when she dressed for dinner in the evening; perhaps finding that her lips at that time of day tended to become dry, or perhaps not caring to use it in daylight, when its presence would be much more easily detected. For I had learned that she made some considerable parade of not using any kind of cosmetics or artificial aids to beauty; and that, of course, accounted for her carrying it in a box meant for manicure-paste, which might be represented as merely a matter of cleanliness, and at any rate was not to be classed with paint and powder. It was not pleasant to me to have surprised this innocent little deception; but it was as well that I did so, for I soon ascertained beyond doubt that the stuff had been tampered with.

"When I left the chemist's I went and sat in a quiet corner of the Museum grounds. There I put the least touch of the salve on my tongue, and awaited results. In five minutes I had lost all power of connected thought or will; I no longer felt any interest in my own experiment. I was conscious. I felt no discomfort, and no loss of the power of movement. Only my intelligence seemed to be paralysed. For an hour I was looking out upon the world with the soul of an ox, placid and blank."

Trent now opened his fingers and showed a little round box of hammered silver, with a delicate ornamentation running round the lid. It was of about the bigness of a pill-box.

"It seemed best to me that this box should simply disappear, and in some quite natural, unsuspicious way. Merely to remove the salve would have drawn Lady Bosworth's attention to it and set her guessing. She did not suspect the stuff as yet, I was fully convinced; and I thought it well that the affair of her seizures should remain a mystery. Your eyes ask why. Just because I did not want a painful scandal in Mrs. Lancey's family—we are old friends, you see. And now here I am with the box, and neither Lady Bosworth nor any other person has the smallest inkling of its crazy secret but you and I."

He stopped again and looked in Sir Peregrine's eyes. They remained fixed upon him with the gaze of a statue.

"It was plain, of course," Trent continued, "that someone had got at the stuff immediately before she went out to Italy, or immediately on her arrival. The attacks began on the first evening there, two hours after reaching the house. Therefore any tampering with the salve after her arrival was practically impossible. When I asked myself who should have tampered with it before Lady Bosworth left this house to go out to Italy, I was led to form a very unpleasant conjecture."

Sir Peregrine stirred in his chair. "You had been told the truth—or a part of the truth—about our married life, I suppose?"

Trent inclined his head. "Three days ago I arrived in London, and showed a little of this paste to a friend of mine who is an expert analyst. He has sent me a report, which I have here." He handed an envelope across the table. "He was deeply interested in what he found, but I have not satisfied his curiosity. He found the salve to be evenly impregnated with a very slight quantity of a rare alkaloid body called 'purvisine.' Infinitesimal doses of it produce effects on the human organism which he describes, as I can testify, with considerable accuracy. It was discovered, he notes, by Henry Purvis twenty-five years ago; and you will remember, Sir Peregrine, what I only found out by inquiry—that you were assistant to Purvis about that time in Edinburgh, where he had the Chair of medical jurisprudence and toxicology."

He ceased to speak, and there was a short silence. Sir Peregrine gazed at the table before him. Once or twice he drew breath deeply, and at length began to speak calmly.

"I shall not waste words," he said, "in trying to explain fully my state of mind or my action in this matter. But I will tell you enough for your imagination to do

the rest. My feeling for my wife was an infatuation from the beginning, and is still. I was too old for her. I don't think now that she ever cared for me greatly; but she was too strong-minded ever to marry a wealthy fool. By the time we had been married a year I could no longer hide from myself that she had an incurable weakness for philandering. She has surrendered herself to it with less and less restraint, and without any attempt to deceive me on the subject. If I tried to tell you what torture it has been to me, you wouldn't understand. The worst was when she was away from me, staying with her friends. At length I took the step you know. It was undeniably an act of baseness, and we will leave it at that, if you please. If you should ever suffer as I do, you will modify your judgment upon me. I knew of my wife's habit, discovered by you, of using lip-salve at her evening toilette. On the night before her departure I took what was in that box and combined it with a preparation of the drug purvisine. The infinitesimal amount which would pass into the mouth after the application of the salve was calculated to produce for an hour or two the effects you have described, without otherwise doing any harm. But I knew the impression that would be produced upon normal men and women by the sight of anyone in such a state. I wanted to turn her attractiveness into repulsiveness, and I seem to have succeeded. I was mad when I did it. I have been aghast at my own action ever since. I am glad it has been frustrated. And now I should like to know what you intend to do."

Trent took up the box. "If you agree, Sir Peregrine, I shall drop this from Westminster Bridge to-night. And so long as nothing of the sort is practised again, the whole affair shall be buried. Yours is a wretched story, and I don't suppose any of us would find our moral fibre improved by such a situation. I have no more to say."

He rose and moved to the door. Sir Peregrine rose also and stood with lowered eyes, apparently deep in thought.

"I am obliged to you, Mr. Trent," he said, formally. "I may say, too, that your account of your proceedings interested me deeply. I should like to ask a question. How did you contrive that the box should disappear without its owner seeing anything remarkable in its absence?"

"Oh, easily," Trent replied, his hand on the door-knob. "After experimenting on myself, I went back to the house before teatime, when no one happened to be in. I went upstairs to a room where a cockatoo was kept—a mischievous brute—took him off his chain, and carried him into Lady Bosworth's room. There I put him on the dressing-table, and teased him a little with the manicure things to interest him in them. Then I took away one of the pairs of scissors, so that the box shouldn't be the one thing missing, and left him shut in there to do his worst, while I went out of the house again. When I went he was ripping out the silk lining of the case, and had chewed up the silver handles of the things pretty well. After I had gone he went on to destroy various other things. In the riot that took place when he was found, the disappearance of the little box and scissors became a mere detail. Certainly Lady Bosworth suspected nothing.

"I suppose," he added, thoughtfully, "that occasion would be the only time a cockatoo was of any particular use."

And Trent went out.

Eden Phillpotts

PRINCE CHARLIE'S DIRK

from The London Magazine, 1926

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When intellect is seated on a placid brow, honesty looks out of the eyes beneath, and humour lurks at the corners of the resolute mouth below, we are conscious that a man confronts us.

Such were the lineaments of John Ringrose, Detective-Inspector of New Scotland Yard; and to his portrait may be added dark hair on a big, broad head, and a small, well-knit, sturdy body of the middle size.

Though travelling to a new case, the matter did not occupy his mind at this juncture. He smoked his pipe and read industriously the pages of a weekly journal devoted to the culture of fruit. Already John dreamed of a garden, where should grow pears and apples, peaches and plums; but the time was not yet. He stood still on the threshold of his strange career and had been but recently promoted to an inspectorship.

The train pursued a leisurely way through rural scenery. It stopped near hamlets and at halts; then a guard called "Twambley," and John Ringrose rose, folded his railway rug, gripped his large suit-case, and alighted.

An inspector of police was standing on the platform, and beside him a tall, fair young man clad in tweed knickerbockers. He had sloping shoulders and a slight stoop. His flaxen hair curled up round the rim of his cap and he gazed with an anxious expression out of blue and intelligent, though troubled, eyes. He was handsome in a conventional fashion, but revealed a temperament easily excited and lacking in balance. One had guessed him to be an artist of some sort. Ringrose approached the couple, introduced himself, and shook the policeman's hand.

"You'll be Mr. Inspector Burrows, no doubt," he said, "and I'm John Ringrose, from the Yard."

"And welcome," answered the other officer. He was a grey-bearded, tall man with dark brown eyes and a ruddy countenance.

"I'm thinking you'll eat a meal with me," said the elder, "and I'll tell what

there is to tell from my point of view. This is Mr. Vincent Maydew, the nephew of the murdered lady."

John shook the hand extended to him, to find it delicate and feminine in his grasp. He was a student of hands and declared them eloquent of character.

"My respectful sympathy," he said. "A terrible shock, as such things must always be."

Vincent Maydew nodded.

"Thank you," he answered. "I wanted to see you half a minute. You'll need to be at Greystone a good bit, and it occurred to me you might find it more convenient to stop there. The village and the inn are best part of two miles from us, and should you prefer to stop at the house itself, we can make you comfortable."

The detective, who had kept his eyes on the speaker while listening to this invitation, expressed his thanks.

"Very considerate, Mr. Maydew. It may prove the best course; but on the other hand it may not. The days are short and, for some things, we might gain if I was there; for others we might lose. Probably I'll find it better to do my work from outside."

He looked at his watch.

"Half after noon," he said. "I'll have my talk with Inspector Burrows and be at Greystone at half-past two, if you please. Then we can settle the best course of action."

"Thank you," replied the youth. He nodded, bade both men "good-day," and strode off to a motor-bicycle standing outside the station.

When he was gone Mr. Burrows spoke.

"You won't want to go into the house for a day or two, if at all. It's an outside job in my opinion, though I can't give any deep reason for saying so, since there is not an outside clue of any sort or kind. But come and eat, and I'll tell you what there is to it on the surface."

A Ford car swiftly conveyed the men to Twambley, distant a mile from the station. A typical East Devon village was Twambley-in-the-Mire, picturesque, somnolent—the centre of a district where thatch still persisted and where many cottages twinkled with whitewashed or rosy-washed faces under old, moss-grown straw. Now the walls were bare of rose and jasmine, for the time was mid-January and red mud, rather than rustic beauty, triumphed over Twambley.

Leaving his Ford at the Constabulary Station, Inspector Burrows conveyed the visitor to an inn some hundred yards higher up the street, and there, at the Green Man, over a couple of very tough mutton chops, John learned what the other could tell him.

"Miss Mary Maydew," began the inspector, "was seventy-one years old—a maiden lady in good health. A common object of the countryside you might call her, for she'd lived at Greystone as long as any can remember. One brother she had still alive; but her father, Thomas Maydew—a London lawyer—had quarrelled with his son; and when Thomas died—I daresay half a century ago—he left his money and his estate to his daughter. And she's reigned at Greystone

ever since. Her brother—John Maydew—paid her a visit once or twice a year—and it is understood she kept him, giving the man an income. About family particulars Mr. Vincent Maydew will tell you, and also Mr. Fosdike, the lawyer at Exeter.

"Greystone is a big, old-fashioned country house said to date from James I. I don't know whether that's true; but it don't matter. Miss Maydew lived in the west wing, where the kitchen premises lie behind the dwelling-rooms; but a good part of the place, including the big music and dancing hall, the library and museum combined, the billiard-room and, of course, a lot of bedrooms overhead, are shut up.

"The household is very small for a place that size. There's first the dead lady's companion, a Miss Forrester. She's been there a good few years—a very pretty and popular young woman, who has proved a sort of buffer between Miss Maydew and her tenants for a long time. Then there are William and Ann Jay, the butler and his wife. There's only the cook, besides them—an elderly widow woman, the sister of one of my own men. Jane Woodhouse she's called. Outside there's two gardeners and a gardener's boy. They only keep up a bit of garden round the west wing and, of course, the kitchen garden. The second gardener is also a mechanic and tends the electric light plant. He lives at the cottage at the entrance with his wife and two children.

"The staff waits on the old lady—or did so—and on Miss Forrester. There's no lady's maid and Mrs. Jay looked after Miss Maydew of a night, if she was poorly or wanted anything. But she seldom did, being of the old-fashioned, independent sort."

"And what of Mr. Vincent Maydew?" asked the listener.

"He comes and goes. He lives in London and is said to write books and go in for high art and so on. He's been at Greystone a good deal lately, off and on, and he was there when the fatal thing happened, two nights ago. All the inside details you'll get from him, Miss Forrester, and the Jays. And if you want independent information of the family and Miss Forrester, then William Jay can give it, for he's worked for the Maydews all his life and remembers Miss Maydew's father; while if there's anything you want to know about the Jays themselves, I can help you, because they're old friends of my wife and my own."

John made no attempt to hasten Inspector Burrows. He listened with close attention to his story, and abandoning a struggle with the leathery chops, turned to a large and promising wedge of orange-coloured Cheshire cheese.

"Not a soul in the house was disturbed on the fatal night," continued the inspector; "but when Mrs. Jay took in Miss Maydew's early cup of tea, at half-past seven, she found the lady dead. She'd been stabbed under the left breast—just one deep, wicked wound, that went to the heart and must have killed her instantly, so Doctor Forbes says. The bedclothes had been dragged off her and the knife driven home. There was no struggle and not a thing out of its place. Her bedroom window was open two inches at the top, but that it always would be, winter and summer, and the blind was up as usual, because the last thing the old lady did at night, before she got into bed, was to pull up the blind.

"There was no disorder and nothing unusual anywhere, and not a trace in the room, or passage, or house next morning, to show an intruder. Nor was there a sign of a weapon.

"The doctor judged the old woman had been dead since midnight, or not much later, for she was stone cold when he got to her; but it was a cold night and she being a thin creature, and lying bare like that no doubt the heat soon left her body after the life left it.

"Outside the window there was nothing to show—not a scratch on the window-ledge or bare wall round about, and not a touch upon the flower-bed that runs along the ground beneath. I, myself, conducted that examination and can testify from long experience that none of the little marks, inevitable if there had been entry or exit from the window, were there. Neither inside nor outside did we find a shadow of a clue."

"And yet you said, when we met, that this is certainly an outside job?"

"I do say so—for the reason that it can't have been an inside one. Everybody in that house is beyond suspicion. You can take each and turn him, or her, inside out and you'll find no excuse why they should have killed the old woman. At least, no cause that's known to me, or anybody here. There may be plenty of information waiting for you at Greystone, but, on the face of it, one can see no motives in any case. Miss Maydew was very rich, and all in that house lived by her. Her companion loses her job now; and, unless Vincent Maydew keeps on the old staff, Jay and his wife and Mrs. Woodhouse will be out of very good employment."

"Vincent Maydew's the heir, then?"

"So I'm given to understand. There's only him and his uncle interested, and William Jay knows for a fact—or did, when he mentioned the family to me six weeks ago in conversation—that the young man was the heir and not John Maydew, the dead lady's brother. However, that may be all different now. You'll find out in due course."

"And the household all happy and pulling together comfortably?"

"So far as I know. I wouldn't say Jay liked Miss Forrester. What their difference was I never heard, but he gave me the impression that he was a bit jealous of her power over the old woman. An old servant might feel like that if he'd been used to first place and she'd taken the lead and been trusted and consulted more than him."

"So he might."

"Don't imagine there was any quarrel, however, because I'm in a position to say there was not. William didn't, perhaps, like Miss Forrester's power over the mistress; but he never said a word against the young woman herself. In fact, she's exceedingly popular at Twambley—a parish worker and an understanding, kindly young creature. Also a beauty—out of the common handsome."

"And you found nothing, inspector?"

"Not a solitary thing, Ringrose. Not a spot; not a shirt-button. Somebody went into that room and killed the old woman with a blow; then he left that sleeping house. Nothing was found open next morning—bolts and bars all in

their places. The murderer got clean away with it and not a trace of him remained behind."

"And you honestly believe the people in the house had nothing to do with it?"

"Emphatically. It's purely a matter of motive. If it's true, as Jay thinks, that Mr. Vincent Maydew is the heir, then you may say he might be glad for his aunt to die; but no sane man can imagine he would hasten the death of one who willed him so well. Besides, look at him; listen to him. He's not that sort. And everybody else in the house and on the staff is a loser by Miss Maydew's death."

John Ringrose said little; but he perceived that the local man was speaking and arguing on what might be very insufficient knowledge. The situation had yet to be revealed, and he suspected that his course of action would lie along no conventional path and depend upon no material clues. Already, with a strange added sense for which he was famous, the young detective's intuition told him that Mr. Burrows was not within sight of the needful preliminary line of thought.

An hour later John drove out to Greystone and beheld a large, undistinguished house, a portion of which was in occupation. He proceeded on routine lines, studied the face of the murdered woman in her coffin, and beheld an austere, bleak countenance that even death had been powerless to soften.

The inquest was fixed for the following day, and Ringrose proceeded with preliminaries, leaving his first examination of the living until daylight failed. The theatre of the crime offered no complications. From the large main hall of Greystone, a flight of shallow stairs ascended to the first storey, and at the extreme west end of this corridor Miss Maydew had her private apartments. They consisted of a bedroom and boudoir leading out of it. Other bedrooms extended along the broad passageway of the first floor and faced south, while a service staircase opened not far from the corner occupied by the dead woman and descended to the kitchen premises on the ground floor. Immediately beneath Miss Maydew's bedroom was the dining-room—a comparatively small chamber used for that purpose. The deceased lady had entertained but little and the larger public apartments were all closed.

Two others had slept on the upper floor upon the night of the murder. Miss Juanita Forrester occupied a bedroom distant but three doors from her employer's chamber; while Vincent Maydew always chose the same apartment when visiting his aunt—an eastern-facing room at the other end of the main corridor. Eight empty rooms separated his apartment from Miss Forrester's. The servants slept in the rear of the house, Jay and his wife occupying one north-facing room, while the bedroom of Mrs. Woodhouse was not far distant.

The whole radius of occupation, as compared with the total bulk of the house, was absurdly restricted. Half a dozen persons only inhabited a mansion that might have furnished accommodation for half a hundred.

Ringrose, having inspected the chamber of the crime and the adjacent boudoir, made a tour of the house and met Miss Forrester and the domestic servants. Juanita Forrester, to whom Mr. Maydew introduced him over a cup of tea, offered a challenge during the first five minutes of their meeting. She was dark

and, so she told him, very much like her Spanish mother. "A poor copy," she said. Her parents were no more, and her father's death leaving the young woman penniless, she was forced to earn her own living. An advertisement had attracted her, and, on visiting Miss Maydew, then in search of a new companion, she satisfied the stern old lady and obtained the post.

The girl's remarkable frankness, contrasted with Vincent Maydew's obvious distress, impressed Ringrose at this brief preliminary interview. Juanita was a pretty woman, typically Spanish. She displayed a small and perfect figure, with a pale, oval face and immense wealth of black hair piled over her white forehead and supported by a black tortoiseshell comb. Her eyes were marvellous, and John had never seen such a pair; while her full-lipped but firm mouth and perfect little nose completed a countenance of unusual beauty.

Her expression was placid, yet not devoid of pride, and her gaze direct and steadfast. She revealed no particular sorrow at the disaster and was self-contained but deeply interested.

"I never liked Miss Maydew," she said, speaking in level and unemotional tones. "She was a bitter, unkind old woman, with no milk of human kindness in her. A tyrant, and used her power unjustly. But for circumstances which Mr. Maydew will give you I should long since have left her. No companion ever stayed here as long as I. But it served my purpose to remain, for personal reasons concerning which there need be no secrecy. These you will hear."

"In your relations with the lady you can form no conclusions as to the reason for her death, nor think of anything to help me?" asked Ringrose, but she shook her head.

"I understand what you mean. I answered many of her letters, but was not in her secrets—if she had any. I don't think she had. She was direct and open in all her dealings—cruelly so sometimes. She loved power. I did what I could, in my very small way, for tenants, and often helped them with her. I'm afraid many humble people rather hated her, for she was hard and grasping; but it is impossible for me to point to anybody who hated her enough to kill her. Twambley people are all easy-going and law-abiding in my experience."

"You can form no theory of this murder?"

"None, Mr. Ringrose. Vincent and I have tried hard to do so. So has Mr. Burrows; so has Mr. Mainprice, the bailiff; so has William, the butler. Perhaps William and his wife, Ann, knew her better than anybody."

"Apart from the possibility," continued Vincent Maydew, "there are the facts. Inspector Burrows thinks it was somebody from outside, since nobody from inside can be suspected. But how did they get in, and, still more difficult to understand, how did they get out again and leave no window or door open to show it?"

They explained the geography of the house, while Ringrose listened with interest. Juanita was sagacious and logical. No personal sorrow confused her clarity. She appeared profoundly interested but utterly unmoved, while her companion, the fair young man, made no attempt to hide his mingled emotions. It was not, however, the death of his aunt which caused his obvious anxiety and

concern. He spoke of her with pity, but without regret. The secret of his uneasiness remained to be learned. Their first interview extended only over a cup of tea, but it decided Ringrose in a main particular. He determined to come to Greystone and operate from within. His decision was not, however, imparted to Maydew until he had seen the indoor servants.

Mr. Jay proved a commonplace little man, with a dull, putty-coloured face, white whiskers, a dry, old-maidish manner, a sharp, long nose, and a high forehead. People said he had framed himself upon his mistress. But while servile to his betters, he was suspected of tyranny behind the scenes. He proved voluble, and John discovered that in the kitchen, as above stairs, interest in the crime was great, though sorrow for the sufferer little. Only Mrs. Jay appeared to feel the catastrophe, but in her case self-pity had loosened tears. She it was who had found her dead mistress and suffered from the shock of that horrible experience. She was a thin, grey-haired woman, nervous and irresponsible.

William, in measured phrases and with a sort of dry unction, told his tale; but when asked if his knowledge of Miss Maydew and her affairs sufficed to inspire a theory, or prompt to suggestions, he could only shake his head.

"To me it's a bigger puzzle than it might be to most," said Mr. Jay, "because of my inner knowledge. It happens that me and Inspector Burrows are old friends, and so he went into it with me pretty deep. We don't agree and, while my heart is with him, if you understand, my head is not."

"You're in a dilemma about it?"

"That's the word. This thing was done either from inside or from outside, Mr. Detective. So far so good. But there's everything to show it couldn't have been done from inside, and yet again there's everything to show it couldn't have been done from outside."

"Suppose we assume it was done from outside—with help from inside?"

"A clever thought, and it would do away with one difficulty, but not the other. If it was done with help from outside, that argues that somebody in the house would deliberately have lent a hand to murder Miss Maydew, and from that to doing the deed wouldn't be far. The will would be there. There's five people might have let a murderer in and showed him where she was, and let him out after he'd killed her without waking the rest. Strictly speaking, there's four, because husband and wife are one, and it would have been as difficult for me to leave my partner without waking her as it would have been for her to leave me, sleeping as we do in a four-post bed.

"Take 'em one by one. Mr. Vincent Maydew will tell you about the family complications, because that's no business of mine, and what I might hear, or not hear, when waiting on the family, is beside the question. But as to him, you could swear on your oath he wouldn't kill a fly, let alone his aunt, whatever she'd done to vex him. He's not even a sportsman—all for poetry and art and so on—a bit of a namby, to say it kindly. He'd think twice before he'd kill a wasp, let alone an old woman. Then there's Miss Juanita Forrester, been here four years. She's foreign on her mother's side, no doubt—Spanish—but no fellow-creature ever won the affection of a place like what she has done at Greystone and all

round about. A heart of gold, you may say, and never did any man, woman, or child quarrel with the gentle creature."

"You couldn't," declared Mrs. Jay. "Wonderful human she is for such a young thing. Many a time she's showed pity for me and Jane, the cook, when Miss Maydew sent out hard, beastly, bullying messages. She's brought 'em, as in duty bound, but she's taken the edge off 'em. And everybody—Mr. Mainprice, the bailiff, included—will tell you she's everlasting on the side of kindness and gentleness. She's only stopped with such an employer for her wages and a comfortable home, I reckon."

"That's the point," added William. "That lets her out, just as it lets me and my wife and Jane out. We all suffered Miss Maydew because we had our living to earn and weren't likely to kill the goose that laid the golden egg. So you may take it in reason that none of us would have done it, nor yet help to do it, even if we was built to be criminals. But where are we, then? Up against the fact it weren't done from inside, or with help from inside. And yet, when Burrows says it was done from outside, I'm in a position to swear that not a bolt, or bar, or window-catch was out of place. Master himself went round with me when my wife brought the fatal news."

"You regard Mr. Maydew as your master now, then?" asked the detective.

"Yes, sir; Mr. Vincent is the master, so far as we know yet."

Ringrose did not press him further.

"I'm coming to stop here for the present," he said, and the butler and his wife expressed satisfaction at the fact. He then spoke with Mrs. Woodhouse, the cook, and found her chatty, civil, and indifferent. Jane was a big, amiable woman of handsome presence and well-mannered. She had no opinions on the subject, but appeared chiefly interested concerning her late mistress' fate in the world to come.

"I'm a religious creature," she explained, "and I'm fearing that a hard case like Miss Maydew, cut off so sudden, may wake up to a very sharp reminder in the next world. However, thank Heaven, there's pardon for all there. But you'd say she'll take a lot of forgiving when the Books be opened."

Ringrose announced his determination to stay at Greystone presently, and Vincent Maydew accepted it without demur. Of all beneath that roof, the present master of it seemed most downcast and perturbed. Now the day was done and John Ringrose returned to Twambley beside Inspector Burrows, who had arrived with his car.

John declared himself as at present without light and, leaving the inspector after a second cup of tea, carried his suit-case up to Greystone and found a room prepared for him.

He dined with Maydew and Miss Forrester, and after the lady had left them, the young man took Ringrose to a small study, gave him a good cigar, and prepared to tell his part of the story.

Vincent Maydew spoke clearly, yet with a measure of nervousness and even dread. His mind was fretted and his concern appeared to rise from private thoughts, rather than out of the narrative he unfolded for the detective's ear.

"The situation is simple now," he said, "thanks to an extraordinary coincidence. My uncle, John Maydew, died three days ago—a natural death. I only heard the fact by this morning's post. But I will come to what that means in a moment. The situation a week ago was this. There were then three of my family living. Now I alone remain. I enjoyed my aunt's confidence and respect, for though she did not much value my literary work, she knew me to be a serious man and a steady one. I was her heir, while her brother received from her an allowance of one thousand a year and no more. This she intended to continue for his life. They were quite friendly, and Uncle John visited his sister twice a year; but he was a bachelor and she held her allowance enough for him, because she knew that he did nothing, and she hated an idle man, even if he were old. That Uncle John was intemperate and unwise she did not know, for he was very careful to conceal the fact when he came to see her.

"So things stood, and then came the complication.

"I fell in love with Juanita—Miss Forrester—and could not see why on earth I should not win her, when I found my love returned. Juanita, however, believed—rightly as time proved—that my aunt would object to such an engagement. However, I was not prepared to wait for ever, and after a secret betrothal extending over more than a year, I told my future wife that there was no rational ground for further delay. We loved each other with absolute devotion, and, while only a companion to Miss Maydew, she was my life to me.

"A week ago I informed Aunt Mary that I proposed to wed Juanita as soon as she could find another companion to suit her. The result was appalling. I need not go over the fearful row, but I was accused of every sort of crime, and Miss Maydew absolutely declined to sanction the engagement. Juanita pleaded in vain. The old woman blamed her bitterly enough; but me she attacked with that ferocious and venomous temper common to her when the least incident threatened her convenience, or crossed her will. She told me plainly that she should disinherit me if I took Juanita from her, and at last a succession of violent scenes culminated with Juanita finally on my side.

"What man could do less? My aunt was sound as a bell and good at least for another ten years. I expressed my sorrow, but was firm. Then she sent for her lawyer, Mr. Fosdike, from Exeter, and made a new will, leaving all her property to her brother.

"On the morning which found her dead, I was leaving Greystone for good, and Juanita, at my wish, was remaining until it pleased my aunt to dismiss her. Of course, I stopped when we heard the terrible news. And now Fate has willed this extraordinary sequel. My uncle never lived to know what Miss Maydew had done. He was actually dead a few hours before she did it. There was no bequest of the residue of Miss Maydew's fortune. She had made an absolute bequest of everything to John Maydew; but that, of course, becomes inoperative, because he predeceased her. As her next-of-kin, therefore, everything passes to me."

The young man stopped and sighed.

"That's all there is to tell, I think; and whether it will help you I know not."

"It is very possible that it may," answered Ringrose. "At any rate, after the

inquest and a search round to-morrow, I'll see Miss Maydew's lawyer and the new will. You never know where you may get a ray of light. At any rate, the legal position is clear. Owing to the death of John Maydew before his sister signed, the bequest to him lapses and falls into the residue. But you say there is none, so, as next-of-kin, you stand exactly where you did, and her purpose to cut you out was defeated. Thank you for this lucid summary. And now tell me what's biting you, as the Americans say. This shocking affair naturally saddens you, especially as relations were so badly strained at the finish; but there's more to your distress than that."

Maydew stared and flushed; then he recovered himself.

"You are mistaken. I'm all right. Nothing but natural concern and sorrow for this awful mystery troubles me. I can't let a passing estrangement come between me and the long memory of the past. She was hard and difficult, but I had little cause to hate her, and at the worst I never actually hated her. I was only deeply distressed that I had to run counter to her wishes."

Ringrose did not pursue the subject.

"So much the better; I'm glad I was wrong," he said. "I only thought you might be hiding something you held not pertinent to the case; but don't do that, Mr. Maydew. The most unexpected and apparently trivial facts often contain the kernel of the nut."

"I can understand they might," answered the other. "Be very sure, if anything occurs to me as remotely useful, you shall be the first to know it."

"You are, of course, in complete understanding with Miss Forrester?"

"Complete and absolute," replied Vincent. "We are one, heart and soul."

"Tell me exactly when you heard of your uncle's death, and from whom."

"This morning, by the first post. The news was somewhat delayed, as Uncle John's lawyers were not informed of his death until twenty-four hours after it had happened. They had, of course, already heard of this murder through the newspapers, and for another day didn't know whom to write to. Then Uncle John's landlady told them about me, and they wrote to me at Greystone, directing the letter to be forwarded if I were not here."

He took the letter of which he spoke from a pocket-book and handed it to his visitor.

The detective scanned the note and returned it.

They chatted for another half-hour and then John Ringrose decided that he would go to bed. Their attitude was cordial on the elder's side, restrained and somewhat inconsequent on the part of his host. But Maydew presently conducted the visitor to his apartment, expressed hopes that all was as he desired it, and asked him if he would breakfast in his own room or join Juanita and himself. Ringrose preferred the latter course.

"Let me breakfast with you," he said. "And the later the better."

"Nine too early?"

"That will do exceedingly well," answered the detective, who had made private plans for the morning.

He was up and dressed at six, and as the light increased had worked in-

dustriously through the silent house for an hour and more before any domestic appeared. Neither the upper floor nor the scene of the murder occupied him; he devoted the early hours of a grey and very cold morning to examination of the dwelling-rooms. There were no bulbs in the electric sconces, but he opened shutters and conducted a general investigation, which ended at a huge apartment devoted to books and containing glass cases, wherein were stored a mixed collection of curiosities from all lands.

The great chamber lay deserted and deep in dust. A gallery lifted some feet above the top of the bookshelves, ran round the walls, and the place was lighted from a lantern of frosted glass in the roof.

Ringrose readily perceived that the bygone head of the family was responsible for a collection which had suffered neglect since his departure. He examined the receptacles with mild astonishment at the heterogeneous curios assembled within them; then something arrested him and he stopped and bent over a show-case situate immediately beneath the central dome. Not a curiosity, but a missing one, had challenged his attention. Care and patience marked the collection and everything was labelled, while to many objects were attached information concerning them. Thus an empty card immediately arrested the eye. Something had disappeared from its place, and the enquirer was concerned to know what. The lid of the glass show-case opened to his touch and he drew forth a card and read the few words neatly printed upon it. They proved exceedingly significant.

The empty place had held a dirk, "Once the authentic property of Prince Charlie."

John Ringrose restored the card to its place. He observed that the vanished weapon had been fastened to the card with a piece of pink tape, and that the tape had been cut to liberate it. A fragment only remained. The discovery ended his present investigation within doors. The dawn had broken, the sky was burning redly to the East, and he presently let himself through a French window in the disused great drawing-room, and strolled the terrace. A clue so simple and direct as the missing dirk created natural mistrust. John told himself that such things do not happen. He suspected an ingenious attempt to hoodwink him, but could not feel sure, since the possibility that he would examine the contents of the old and neglected collection with close care must have seemed doubtful to any interested in his actions. Moreover, an explanation might be immediately forthcoming, did he seek it from the household.

At breakfast he met his host and Juanita. The girl was pale and dressed in black, and the young man appeared if possible more anxious than on the preceding day. Miss Forrester, however, showed no perturbation. She was frankly interested in the inquest, timed for noon, and she asked John various questions concerning the procedure of the enquiry.

He said nothing of his morning's work within the house, and studied the man and woman carefully. His unique gift, to bring a human touch into every relation with his fellow-creatures, served the detective as usual. He found the tension relax and soon established himself in friendly relations with Juanita. She interested him least, however, for her complete self-possession, and a certain directness

of speech and thought were obviously natural and not assumed. The young woman made no pretence of sorrow, and John perceived that, like himself, she was secretly a little puzzled by her sweetheart. Their common affection neither attempted to conceal. They were passionately in love, but while the course of events and the sequel to the tragedy now meant certain happiness for Juanita, she indicated in some subtle fashion that she could not fathom Vincent Maydew's profound depression.

Ringrose perceived this and it interested him. That the young man should be agitated and even oppressed by the terrible event that had lifted his problems off his shoulders was not strange, but why such sustained melancholy and obvious anxiety? There was a mystery here whose significance, John already suspected, would, if explained, help him upon his way.

Of one thing the detective was now secretly assured: the crime, if not actually committed by a member of the dead woman's household, had been assisted from within. That the assassin had come from without remained a probability, but he had not worked without help, and Ringrose felt already confident that a large measure of the truth might be known to somebody with whom he had already spoken. As yet he associated none of them more than another with the commission of the deed, but began to believe that, if anybody in reality knew anything at all, it was Vincent Maydew.

After breakfast he examined the upper floor with close scrutiny, and visited not only each of the occupied chambers, but also those for many years disused. The result of these investigations John kept to himself, and, of course, he pursued them alone. But they presented him with two interesting discoveries: the splintered edge of a broken board in the floor of Juanita Forrester's bedroom cupboard, and a piece of pink tape.

The inquest, conducted in the great drawing-room, pursued its way and threw no light, unless upon the mind of the detective, who silently attended it. The coroner, a sagacious and capable man, ruled his court with tact and sympathy. Each witness gave an explicit account from his or her own point of view. But Miss Forrester's evidence proved the most interesting. With absolute frankness she revealed the inner situation of those chiefly concerned—her lover and herself—and related the family quarrel and the attitude of the dead woman to her nephew's announcement of his engagement. She told all that Ringrose had heard on the previous evening from Vincent Maydew, and John was not dead to the deep attention with which the young man listened while his sweetheart spoke. It appeared that she had been nearer to the heart of the tragedy than anybody imagined.

"After that terrible conflict between Mr. Maydew and his aunt," said Juanita, "I could not sleep and on the night of Miss Maydew's death I was faced with another sleepless night, because Mr. Vincent was leaving that day. At two o'clock in the morning I left my room, lighted a candle, and went down into the library for something to read, that I might distract my mind and get to sleep. I found a book; and then I left the great library and went into the small one, used as a dining-room. From the sideboard I took some biscuits and poured

myself out a glass of port wine from the decanter. I ate the biscuits, drank the wine, and went upstairs again with my book.

"It was then, just as I reached the corridor at the top of the great flight of stairs, that I thought I heard a sound in the passage, at the far end, near Miss Maydew's corner of the corridor. It was a sound like the quiet shutting of a door. I left my book on a console table, that stands opposite the top of the staircase, and went to Miss Maydew's door. Everything was quiet, and I then opened the swing door on the opposite side of the corridor, which gives upon the service staircase. I went to the top of the service staircase and listened, but heard nothing. I half fancied I saw the glimmer of a light below, but I was holding my own candle all the time and could not be sure the light came from another. I blew out my own candle, but the light—if light there was—had vanished. Everything was quite silent and quite dark.

"I stood for a few moments listening, then went back to bed with my book. I must have gone to sleep reading it, for when I was called, Ann—Mrs. Jay—laughed at me and said I had forgotten to turn out the electric light. She had, of course, not been to her mistress then. She always called me first."

The coroner put various questions upon this evidence, but Juanita had nothing to add to it, and its value appeared negative, since both the sound and the light were an impression rather than a conviction in her mind.

Ringrose perceived that Maydew showed signs of relief when his sweetheart's testimony and examination concluded. The young man himself had little to say, save that on hearing the news he had risen instantly and hunted the house with William. The servants reported only what the police already knew.

Mr. Fosdike, Miss Maydew's lawyer, spoke as to the new will and, when opportunity offered, agreed to let John Ringrose see the document on the following day. The police reiterated their belief that the murder had been committed from outside, though not a trace of evidence existed to support it; but the staff stood on friendly terms with members of the Force, and the coroner pointed out that there existed nobody within Greystone who could have gained any advantage from Mary Maydew's death save, indeed, Vincent Maydew. Vincent himself admitted how on the night of the murder, he was ignorant of his uncle's end, and still imagined that he had lost all. Ringrose observed that the young man created no suspicion in the minds of the jury, or the police by this statement.

The inquest was adjourned for a fortnight and the proceedings terminated.

It was reserved for the detective's next private interview with his host to quicken interest at last and create for John a sensation far beyond any that his business had, as yet, brought him. That, however, did not come till night.

During the afternoon he again busied himself in the house, yet, for personal reasons, kept severely aloof from the chief occupants. He was now in doubt before a curious conflict of clues and spent most of his time with the Jays, accepting the housekeeper's invitation to tea and listening to the old woman's conversation. He also visited the library and museum a second time for his own purpose and, discovering a second dirk fixed to a card, which recorded its

historical interest, removed the weapon, wrapped it up in his pocket handkerchief, and presently returning to the chamber on the ground floor, where the dead woman lay, again examined the body.

He left the house after dark and called upon the local practitioner—a Dr. Forbes, who had given evidence of the death wound at the inquest.

He was back at Greystone in time for dinner, at which meal Vincent Maydew appeared more silent than on the previous night. He ate little, but drank rather heavily. It was evident that Juanita felt increased anxiety on his account, and desired private speech with Ringrose. The meal ended, he prepared to give her the opportunity she sought, but then became aware that Vincent Maydew had marked her wish. It was easy for the girl's lover to frustrate any possible private interview at this moment, and he took care to do so.

Explaining that he wanted some immediate conversation with the detective, Vincent drew John away to the small sitting-room, and when coffee and liqueurs were served and Ringrose had lighted a cigar, Maydew locked the door and plunged into a hurried narrative. He was very pale; his drink had made him perspire and he mopped his face as he spoke.

"Mr. Ringrose," began the young man, "I can stand this no longer. I have something to say to you, and I have something to offer you. I'm not so much concerned for myself as another; that's why I want to couple a big proposal with what I have to tell you. Do not feel annoyed—I implore you to keep an open mind. When you recognise my situation your humanity will at least prevent you from being angry with me—or anybody. I have no right to ask for the least sacrifice of principle from you, and it lies entirely in your power to ignore my suggestion; but I know you are too generous not to understand it, and far too acute not to see that I plead for another rather than myself."

He stopped a moment, but Ringrose did not speak. Then Maydew confessed to the crime.

"I killed my aunt in a moment of stark aberration. The deed is done, and I am faced with the consequences; but all that matters now is this: that I insist upon leaving the sequel in your hands. Do you gather my meaning, Mr. Ringrose?"

The detective regarded him without speech for a moment. Then he spoke.

"I think so; but you had better make it clearer."

"In a word, then, I yielded to a passing wave of irrational hate against the old woman who had treated me so damnably, and feeling assured that the world would be better without her, I destroyed her. Some devil played with me, and I committed a cowardly and infernal crime on the spur of passion, convinced that I did evil that good might come. The irony of the situation when I heard my uncle was dead you will appreciate. I worked swiftly, yet believed that I had laid my plans so perfectly that discovery must prove impossible. Now I know otherwise. I know you will presently discover the truth, and so confess to save you any more trouble."

Ringrose summoned a picture to his mind and smiled internally. It was a vision that must have appeared very inappropriate to any beholder less subtle

than himself. He saw a hen partridge pretending to be wounded and fluttering clumsily along the ground, to distract an enemy from her chickens. But a moment later this theory of the situation was clouded, for the young man made swift and complete response to the obvious challenge now offered.

"You say you killed the old lady, Mr. Maydew. Can you prove it?" asked John, and his question met instant answer, for rising, Maydew proceeded to a small desk, unlocked it, and then moved an invisible spring which revealed a secret drawer. Within this receptacle lay an object wrapped in paper, and he now handed the parcel to Ringrose.

"I killed Mary Maydew with that dirk," he said quietly. "I took it from the museum—the collection made by my grandfather. It is a dagger which is supposed to have been the property of Prince Charlie. I had meant, of course, to put it back in its place. You will see the card from which I took it if you examine the large central case in the library."

Ringrose examined the weapon. The haft was of chased silver, the head, a huge golden cairngorm that shone and sparkled. The blade was of blue steel, and blood had dried upon it.

"You would soon have proved me guilty," continued the criminal quietly. "I quickly saw that my fancied security was vain. And the revelation of what such work as this means to the sinner is so terrible that, if I had to consider myself alone, I should have either confessed within twenty-four hours of the crime, or destroyed myself. But the situation is terribly complicated for me by a fellow-creature. I could escape my own sufferings by death, and my remorse would end with my life; but if my life ends, another precious and innocent life will practically end with it. Knowledge of the truth must assuredly kill Juanita. It is not that I should lose her; the point seems to be this: that her life is ruined if this becomes known, and so the innocent suffers far more terribly than it is possible for the guilty to do. Life to me, you understand, is henceforth a punishment rather than a boon. I should already have ended my existence but for the thought of her agony. For her sake only I am stripping the truth naked and putting myself in your hands."

The listener showed less concern than might have been expected before a situation so tragical.

"And what follows?" he asked.

"What follows is this, Mr. Ringrose. To me it appears an ethical question, and so I hope and pray it may appear to you. That the righteous should suffer for the guilty is a commonplace. No man can sin as I have sinned and endure the consequences alone. Many innocent persons are called to a punishment they did not deserve, and my one thought at present—my one resolve—is to save others from the consequences of my crime to the best of my power. That may be done by myself in every case save one. The servants will receive money and adequate pensions in any case. They lose nothing; but, if the truth becomes known, then a punishment that is far worse than the sentence of death falls on Juanita. Only for her I plead. Do believe that. Life, even with her, must now be incomparably more terrible for me than swift and merciful death. But for her

sake I plead to live because the truth would destroy her and cover that guiltless head with shame. Her temperament is such that knowledge of this thing would bring a measure of agony impossible to describe. Her reason might well succumb to it; or, unable to face such an appalling situation, she might take her own life. She is made of precious stuff, Mr. Ringrose, and rather than that she should be called to drink this cup, I would live—for her sake alone."

The other listened intently. He studied every word and every gesture that accompanied it. He indicated that he felt much impressed.

"You ask me to respect your secret and condone your crime?" he said, when the young man ceased.

"For the human reason that I have given. For my unfortunate girl alone. I should not beg for my own sake. I have no wish to live now. You know I have spoken the truth. I am only concerned to do right, and Juanita's life is a thousand times more precious to the world than mine. Rather than that she shall be destroyed, I am prepared to live; and seeing that justice—a justice about any law of man—cries out for Juanita, I implore you to meet me. I would press the ethical side upon you, Mr. Ringrose. Your duty lies on another plane, and no doubt you do it as a rule, sternly regardless of consequences; but you are not a machine only; you are a man of genius, and I have seen enough of you to know that humanity means much to you."

"Granted; but duty often clashes with inclination," replied John, taking another cigar. "An action may have two sides and look wrong from one aspect, right from another. For the sake of argument, suppose I fail to solve this case. I am perhaps doing a humane thing—a thing which might, or might not, be justified on strictly moral grounds; but I am none the less being false to myself and my employers. And that is not all. Failure in a case, which already began to resolve its difficulties pretty swiftly, means a great deal more than a doubtful hope that I may have done rightly by pretending to fail. It means that punishment for your crime falls on me also. I fail where I ought to succeed; I deliberately permit a black mark to be scored against me where it matters most—at Headquarters. I celebrate my promotion to a detective-inspectorship by a very inefficient piece of work. Perhaps that situation had not occurred to you?"

"It had. I recognise it. I recognised it from the first. I have imagination to see how this must look in your professional eyes, and had you been a different sort of man I should have felt the case was hopeless. But you revealed a heart and a deep human sense of sympathy. That is what I am coming to now. You concede that for the sake of the innocent, the crime might reasonably be concealed, and you know that concealment is by no means a blessing or boon to the criminal. The rights and wrongs of concealment do not eliminate each other and leave the situation doubtful. Everything points to the fact that concealment in this case is the highest justice and brings the greatest good to the innocent. That only leaves your personal position; and I venture to think that the wrong your reputation undoubtedly suffers—the actual injustice done to you by concealment may be regarded purely as a matter of business."

Ringrose nodded.

"It is a point of view," he said.

"One case in your career amounts to little," argued Maydew, with increasing hope. "Everybody knows that you are an extraordinary man, and probably your next mystery will be solved with such speed and brilliance that this affair must quickly be forgotten. So confident I am of that, and so sure that failure in this affair cannot really harm anything but your natural self-esteem, that I feel it in no sense a slight or reflection upon your honour to make it a question of money. I insist again that this is no selfish bargain. My crime will never torment me less than now; but even legal justice should be rightly concerned with the welfare of the innocent before the destruction of the guilty. I am a rich man and if, knowing that the highest, purest honour and justice are on your side, you can reduce your own loss in the matter to a financial figure, I should indeed thank Heaven."

For a full minute John Ringrose made no reply. He smoked with his eyes on the blood-stained knife lying on the table before him. Maydew rose after his appeal and wandered the room restlessly.

"Sit down and light your cigar," began the detective at length. "These are interesting and illuminating things you tell me. There is nothing like breadth of vision and, be it as it may, I respect your confidence and admit the strength of your position on strictly ethical grounds. But what is your view on my side? What sort of solatium should you judge may fairly be offered for my obvious loss of credit?"

"I leave it to you, Mr. Ringrose."

"They say every man has his price. One must weigh the advantage of permanent improvement to one's income, against depreciation of one's credit in business."

"A transitory depreciation; but don't speak of having your price, Mr. Ringrose; I couldn't buy you and I well know it. The sole question is, can Juanita's life tempt you? Her very existence is involved. I offer a perfectly reasonable deal that reflects in no way at all on your character—or, I would argue, on mine either."

Mr. Maydew rose, returned to his private desk and produced a cheque-book, while unseen the detective suffered his features to relax into a genial grin. The smile relieved him; but his face was again composed when his host returned to the lamplight.

"I have arranged with Mr. Fosdike," he said, "to have access to capital as it may be required; but I imagine a transaction of this magnitude must be carried out with considerable caution."

"I think so. There is no hurry. There are ways of doing these things. I only need your cheque as evidence of good faith. I shall not, of course, cash it. You may pay me the sum at issue in another way later—with foreign bonds to bearer, or securities you can privately make over. For the moment your cheque will merely be a guarantee of indebtedness."

Mr. Maydew took up his pen.

"Name the figure, then."

"Shall we say ten thousand?"

A wave of thankfulness which he was quite powerless to hide, brought fleeting colour to the young man's face. It seemed that the weight of his sufferings already began to lighten, despite his recent assurance that they never would.

"No," he said, "we will not say ten thousand; we will say twenty thousand, Mr. Ringrose."

"You are generous."

"I am only just. May I never write a cheque with more deep a sense of obligation than I write this one."

He drew the cheque and pushed it across the table.

"I am in your hands," he said, "and the welfare of one who is far more to me than my life lies also in your hands."

"I perfectly understand. You need feel no more anxiety, either on her behalf or your own. The future should prove absolutely clear for you both, Mr. Maydew; but we have none the less got to consider the present from my point of view. There are a few little considerations. We must cover our tracks, for the benefit of those who might not appreciate the high ethical standpoint that has determined our course of action. Your task is quite simple. I shall be busy here—no doubt fruitlessly—poking about and following up clues and so forth; but the clue you so naturally regard as of supreme significance and which you have made me a present of, must return to its accustomed place, and be a clue no more. That is all I require from you. Cleanse it carefully and to-night, when everybody has retired, return it to the central cabinet from which you say you took it."

He picked up the cheque, ran his eye over it, then doubled it up and put it in his pocket.

"And now good-night, Mr. Maydew, and may you sleep in peace."

"I shall sleep as I have not slept for many days," replied the other, shaking the hand extended with warm pressure; and then, as though conscious that his relief was exaggerated, he relapsed and strove to conceal it.

"My own sufferings remain," he declared, "but they must be lessened by the assurance that my future wife will not be called to suffer."

"Time is a great healer," answered Ringrose drily. Concealing the dirk, Vincent Maydew rang for spirits, and having spent another half-hour together, the men separated for the night. But Maydew's work was not yet done. Alone in his own room he cleansed the knife with soap and water and, at two o'clock in the morning, restored it to its place. He was strangely careless of details, however, and fastened it back upon the card with a piece of brown twine.

Though not a religious man, the young fellow spent full twenty minutes on his knees before finally sinking to sleep; but his prophecy of a good night was not fulfilled, and dawn had broken before an exhausted mind permitted him to slumber.

On the following day Ringrose spent some hours in Exeter and proceeded as though his private meeting with young Maydew had not taken place. He was apparently anxious to learn more than either Vincent Maydew or his betrothed

could tell him, and the old family lawyer found himself invited to give all particulars concerning the making of the new will.

"She was an obdurate client," said Mr. Fosdike, a bald, big man with clean-shaven and pendulous cheeks, "and though I understood her, I was usually powerless to influence her. Fiery people, as a rule, between their conflagrations, are reasonable, and will undo in sane moments what they did when 'outside themselves,' as we say. Miss Maydew, however, was both short-tempered and obstinate. She would do unjust things in a rage and stick to them afterwards for pride. A sort of insensate vanity—common in men, but rather rare in women—always made her cleave to a decision, however mistaken. One could not shake her. It was a foolish boast of hers that she had never found the need to apologise in her life! So the new will would most certainly have stood had she lived. I prepared it at her wish. She might have made another will later and appointed someone else her legatee instead of John Maydew, her brother; but she would never have forgiven Vincent Maydew or restored him to his position as residuary legatee. He had crossed her; and those who crossed my client were never pardoned."

"You prepared this new will and went down yourself with it?" asked Ringrose, considering the document.

"That is so. One had to watch things with the lady. Any failure on my part to comply with her demands would have meant speedy loss of a valuable estate. She was quite capable of taking Greystone out of my hands at a moment's warning; and had she done that, nothing on earth would ever have induced her to restore the conduct of her affairs to me."

"There was no secret about this will?"

"None whatever. She told her nephew that he must choose between her and her companion, and gave him exactly twelve hours in which to do so. She could keep in a passion longer than anybody I have ever known. It is an exhausting ordeal for most people; but Miss Maydew seemed to burn with an incandescent rage which failed to consume her dreadful energy. The will, as you see, was exceedingly brief. Before she signed it, I reminded her of various bequests and certain obligations—directions from her late father—which were handed down in the existing will; but all she said was that they could wait and be restored by codicils, if she so wished.

" 'Life is uncertain,' she declared in her icy voice—a voice that always made you feel as though the window were open and an east wind blowing. 'Life is uncertain, and I cannot sleep until this matter is determined and my nephew, Vincent Maydew, aware of his situation.' At a later date she intended to reconsider a few minor points from her former will, which she had not opened for some years; but for the moment all she was concerned with was the blow to Vincent. That struck, and her brother installed as legatee, she grew calmer. By the irony of chance, as you know, her brother predeceased her, and was actually dead before the will came to be signed. Thus the thing she felt chiefly concerned to do was not done, and Maydew, I am glad to say, is not disinherited. Indeed, he is a gainer."

"Who is Alfred Warner?" asked John Ringrose, with his eyes on the will.

"My clerk. He went down with the document when all was done, and he and William Jay attested Miss Maydew's signature."

"Was the former will destroyed?"

"She had specially directed me to preserve it, that she might read it on a future occasion. It embraced certain injunctions handed down by her late father and had to do with the development of the property and other points which it was only right the future heir respected, whomsoever he might be."

"Exactly," said John. "And now, of course, this will goes before Vincent Maydew, and he will respect its provisions. I will ask you to let me see it."

"Most certainly. It can hardly bear on the crime, however."

"On the contrary, I have reason to think it might."

The lawyer fetched it and his visitor spent half an hour in careful study of the document. He made no comment whatever.

His scrutiny completed, John turned to a decanter of sherry and two glasses which had stood at his elbow since the beginning of their conversation. He broke a biscuit and the lawyer poured out two glasses of wine.

"We shall meet again," said the visitor; "and it is my earnest hope that, before we do so, I may have proceeded and found definite clues to this crime. I thank you. You may have assisted me more than you guess."

"Nothing would give me greater satisfaction," declared the other; "but I confess I see no ray of light. You will probably find the criminal outside Greystone, if Providence wills that he should be discovered."

"A crime is not a conjuring trick, Mr. Fosdike. It often appears to defy natural laws and argue supernatural interference with reality. But the police never permit any supernatural theory either to challenge or defeat them. We argue that the seemingly impossible means only that the clue, or pass key, to the mystery is withheld, and we seek steadfastly and untiringly for that. When we fail to find it the unknown conjurer escapes us—perhaps to play his trick again. Sometimes we only catch him the second or third time. I am, however, far from feeling that I shall fail to find both the trick and the trickster in this case."

"Do you anticipate a long enquiry?"

"I do not. I am disposed to believe I may be successful inside a week or ten days. But if I fail within that time I shall probably fail altogether."

The detective took his leave and presently lunched alone. A chance spectator would have marked upon his face neither perturbation nor anxiety. Amusement at private thoughts and a hearty appetite were the natural indications of a mind at peace. Presently he visited the cathedral and listened to the anthem.

Vincent Maydew was gone to London that he might see after the funeral arrangements of his uncle, while two days later the burial of Mary Maydew would take place. But Ringrose found plenty to occupy him on returning that night to Greystone. Indeed, the case forced itself upon his attention, for he found Juanita Forrester anxious to have some conversation while her sweetheart was absent, and William Jay had also something remarkable to communicate.

At tea-time the girl invited John to take his meal with her and when they were alone she explained her care.

"I saw Vincent off this morning," she told him. "After you had gone to Exeter he started on his motor-bicycle to ride up by road the way he best likes over Salisbury Plain. But I am a good deal bothered, Mr. Ringrose. He is taking this dreadful affair in a manner I cannot at all understand. One knows that he must be harrowed and shaken—such a sensitive being as he is—but, as I tried to point out to him, he had no power to prevent the tragedy, and he certainly did not precipitate it in any way. After all, for him, dear fellow, there are very obvious compensations. I daren't tell him so, of course; he'd think it a flippant, cruel, and heartless attitude. Perhaps it is. But when you consider how bitterly Miss Maydew attacked him and how actively she tried to prevent him from enjoying what should have been lawfully his in the future—then I, for one, cannot feel very overwhelmed with grief before his wonderful escape. It would be humbug if I pretended that it was. Yet Vincent is overwhelmed. The crime has had a most extraordinary effect upon him, and I was more conscious of it than ever this morning."

"How so, Miss Forrester?"

"There's something happened to him. It's almost as if his character was changed. He's aloof, abstracted. He stares through you rather than at you. He's not cold exactly—not really changed to me, but changed in himself; and the change does involve a different attitude, even to me. And a change of that sort can only have been produced by some tremendous shock. I know him so well and feel sure of it."

"He said nothing definite?"

"No, he hasn't mentioned his aunt's death to me since the inquest. But the situation now existing, which might have been expected to challenge all his powers of concentration and energy, leaves him apparently indifferent. He wants to get away. He actually spoke as though he might not return to his aunt's funeral! There was something almost reckless in his talk. He said that perhaps he should break his neck on Salisbury Plain and snuff out the last of the family. I was rather shocked, but he spoke as though it might be the best thing that could happen for everybody. Have you known a tragedy like this actually unseat a man's reason?"

"Never, Miss Forrester. There must be something here you don't understand."

"Have you observed anything strange?"

"Since you ask me, I can honestly say that I have. There are undoubtedly reasons for Mr. Maydew's profound preoccupation. He has confided in me up to a point, and be sure I shall respect his confidence. I have, I believe, already set his mind at rest in sundry particulars."

"If you discover the murderer it might go far to calm him," she answered. "I know one thing; that he is tremendously concerned to get to the bottom of poor Miss Maydew's death."

"We must not give up hope yet. Be sure I shall spare no pains to solve the problem, though it certainly looks difficult still."

She changed the subject suddenly.

"I noticed a curious thing in my bedroom cupboard to-day," she said. "I was turning out some dresses to find one I'm going to dye black, and I noticed on the floor of the cupboard a streak of white wood. A splinter, some inches long, must have been torn from the floor of the cupboard. Now I felt positive that was something new, because it impressed my mind as strange. So I examined it, and I found a floorboard of the cupboard quite loose. It had been loosened, so that it was easily lifted. I lifted it and found a hole underneath—an empty hole. It seems to mean nothing, but it must have been done by somebody, for some purpose, and I thought I'd mention it. Did you do it yourself, perhaps, when you were examining my bedroom?"

"No," he answered, "I did not do it; but I have already found what you describe. A receptacle was made there by pulling up a short board, and in the operation a splinter broke from the old deal and left a conspicuous streak of new wood. Beneath, as you say, is a receptacle."

"Made on purpose?"

"No. The hole beneath was natural."

"Did you find anything in it, Mr. Ringrose?"

"Nothing that appears to be very interesting. Only a few inches of pink tape."

"How extraordinary! Might I see them?"

John complied at once, and taking his pocket-book from his breast, soon placed the tape in Juanita's hands.

She could make nothing of it, however.

"It's old and grubby," she said. "It might have been there a hundred years, I should think."

"Yes, it well might. Yet somehow I associate it with the case."

"How extraordinary, Mr. Ringrose. In what way?"

"Indirectly; but the fact is too isolated as yet to be of immediate value. A case, Miss Forrester, is often like an American Cross Word Puzzle. Thick darkness hangs over one light, and, cudgel your brains as you will, you cannot trace any correspondence between the given definition and the wanted word. But presently, as other words are guessed and fitted into their places—behold! without any effort on your part, the wanted word suddenly appears. You have written it without guessing it at all. And so, perhaps, with this shabby fragment of pink tape. It may mean nothing and lie outside the problem altogether, but it may mean something quite important. Obviously an attempt has been made to create a hiding-place in your dress cupboard. But for the splinter we should not have perceived it. The splinter is very curious. I would give a great deal to find that splinter."

"I never thought to look for it," she said.

"You wouldn't, but I did—without success. To return to Mr. Maydew. If I may advise, do not let any strangeness that he may reveal alter your attitude to him. Treat him as usual. He is, as you say, an amazingly sensitive man, an artist, and his nerves are abnormally developed probably. You can best help him by ignoring any oddity of manner or wildness of speech. Time will restore his

balance. Meanwhile, don't mention this subject—the cupboard—to him, or anybody. Be sure to remember that."

Juanita thanked the detective, and, true to herself, strove to show him that she sympathised with his own difficulties and had imagination to realise the painful nature of his work in life. She was gracious and kindly, and in a man himself gracious and kindly her attitude found ready appreciation and response. Already he shared the accepted opinion of Miss Forrester, and when he had left her he might have been expected to balance her sweet nature against the dark secret overhanging the soul of the man she loved, and mourn for both. But no gravity darkened John Ringrose, as he sat presently in the kitchen with Mrs. Jay and the cook, smoked a pipe and listened to their theories of the crime. Jane Woodhouse was indifferent, but the elder woman suffered from reaction.

"You miss her, though she was hard and a driver," confessed Ann. "I told Mr. Maydew so this morning, and he understood, same as he understands everything. 'Yes,' he said, 'you'll miss her, Ann, same as the old convicts they kept in chains missed the irons when they were struck off.'"

"A very good simile, ma'am, no doubt," answered John.

Then he heard that William desired to speak with him, and when he had smoked his pipe he joined the butler, who was cleaning plate in his pantry.

John found Mr. Jay full of a curious little discovery. "It may be nought," he said, "or it may mean a lot. We people are not in a position to tell what's useful and what's useless; you are. It's like this. Have you cast your eyes round the library, Mr. Ringrose?"

"Yes, William. I've had a pretty good look round everything in there."

"You would. And you noticed a pretty knife or two in the show-cases, I expect?"

"I took special note of them. There are two Scottish dirks, and there are other daggers from the East. They interested me above a bit, and you'll understand why. I've satisfied myself, with the doctor's assurance, that pretty well any one of those knives might have done the deed."

"Ah! Trust you! And it's about one of the knives—a Scottish dirk, sir—that I wanted to speak. No doubt you see things about 'em that's hid from me; but I see one thing about one of them that's hid from you."

"Good, William! What is it?"

"Just this. I don't say I'm very well up in the collection, or anything like that. Miss Maydew cared not a button for books or curiosities; but she cared for cleanliness, and it was my job once a month to run over that room, dust the backs of the books, and polish the glass of the show-cases. So I got to know roughly what was in them—the cases, not the books. And I happened to be familiar with the middle case, because the cream of my late master's collection was in it. That Scot's dirk—and I'll take my oath of it—was fastened to its card with a piece of pink tape. 'The Prince Charlie' dirk, Mr. Ringrose. There's no manner of doubt about that. I wouldn't say anybody in this house can substantiate the statement, but I'm prepared to swear to it."

"What of it, William?"

"This: that since the murder, the dirk is fastened to its card with a bit of common book twine, uncoloured. That dirk has been out of the case unknown to me, and now it's back; but the pink tape's gone, and a piece of ordinary string has taken its place."

Ringrose showed deep interest.

"That most certainly means something," he said. "Show me the dirk. Can you describe the former pink tape exactly?"

"You can see the like in the case," answered the old man. "There's a lot of curios tied to their cards with similar stuff."

Mr. Jay lighted a lamp and groaned while doing so.

"I've hurt my arm," he explained, "and got a boil forming on it that gives me pain."

"How did you do that?" asked John, for it was his curious custom to let no statement of any sort or kind go unquestioned, when it came from an interesting person.

"Couldn't tell you more than the dead. I felt pain there a fortnight ago—woke with it, but saw nought but a flea-bite as it seemed. Then it got worse, and my wife's poulticing it."

"Don't let it get worse. A bite's often poisonous. Let your doctor see it."

"I reckon I will," answered Mr. Jay; then Ringrose took the lamp from him and they repaired to the library. The case was soon open and the dirk in the detective's hand. He took it by the blade, then studied the pink tape on other specimens.

"You can form no idea where this string came from?" he asked, but William was unable to say.

"There's nothing distinct to my eye about it," he replied.

"If I remove it, will it be missed?" inquired John.

"Not a chance. Nobody ever looks in these cases."

"There may be finger-prints," exclaimed Ringrose. "That's why I avoid the handle. Thank you, William. Now we'd better separate. I'll look after this knife for the present. Don't mention the subject to anybody."

They parted and the visitor retired to his room, not again appearing until, at Miss Forrester's wish, he dined with her. William waited upon them, but the conversation was turned to the future and devoted to general subjects. Juanita showed concern for the butler's hurt, of which she knew, and repeated John's advice. Indeed, she urged him to delay no longer, and when the meal was ended, Mr. Jay presently donned a thick coat and left the house.

On the following morning he reported that Dr. Forbes had lanced his arm, and that he felt much better in consequence.

In the course of that day Vincent Maydew returned home and, during the evening, he and the detective very vitally advanced their private understanding. But the course of the conversation was little to have been expected.

At dinner, John announced his intention of soon leaving Greystone, and when the meal was ended, the two men departed to the little study as before. Juanita went with them. She remained but half an hour, then retired, and as she kissed

her sweetheart and bade him "good-night," the watcher observed a shadow deepen on the man's face and understood it. Miss Forrester was also conscious of the darkness that still held Vincent Maydew; indeed, she voiced it as she shook John's hand.

"Cheer him up if you can, Mr. Ringrose, for I am powerless to do so," she said, and the elder smiled upon her, while Vincent stared.

"I will make a great effort," promised John, and then, the girl gone, he shut the door he had opened for her and returned to his armchair.

"Mend the fire," he said; "you're in for a pretty long sitting, my friend."

He lighted his cigar and then regarded the melancholy youth before him with an expression in which amusement and deep sympathy were blended.

Maydew spoke first and blurted a piece of information. "That knife's gone out of the museum," he said. "For some infernal reason I was prompted to look at it again to-night before dinner. I went for a book to the library—or said I did—and turning to look at the darned thing, discovered that it had been taken off the card."

Ringrose nodded.

"I took it," he answered.

"Why?"

"I want it. I want to keep it, that I may add it to an interesting little private collection. You'll say you've given me enough, no doubt."

He tapped his breast.

"Twenty thousand pounds sounds good, Mr. Maydew. But I want Prince Charlie's dirk, too, and I guess you'll have no further use for it."

The other flinched before humour he felt intolerable.

"Keep it," he answered, "and leave us as soon as you reasonably can."

"Thank you. That's my intention. But there are vital points to clear to-night."

"You mean the money? Well, in a few months, or possibly less, I will hand you bearer bonds for the full amount."

"Excellent! But there's another interesting little complication I've got to break to you. I think I know who really murdered Miss Maydew."

Agony convulsed John's hearer. Vincent glared and for a moment could not speak; but the other was quick to spare him all needless torture. He rose, poured a stiff whisky, added but a splash of soda from a siphon, and took command.

"Drink and listen. It was not Miss Forrester. She is as innocent as yourself, my friend."

The sufferer stiffened and grew deadly pale; his eyes rolled up and he was about to faint; but relief took another turn. He had already drunk at the other's command. Now he relaxed; his heart leapt and he burst into tears. John, knowing that all was well, patted his shoulder, spoke comforting words, then left Maydew to recover. Indeed, he was moved himself, and though his eyes twinkled, they were dim. Silence fell on them; as Maydew regained self-control and looked longingly at the door, his visitor spoke.

"Yes, I know what you want to do, young fellow. You want to bolt to her and

throw yourself on your knees at her feet, and ask her forgiveness, and tell her you're the most unworthy dog that ever loved a rare girl who was too good for him. But that's a scene you must play in your own heart and nowhere on this earth. Now listen to me. Sit still, light a cigarette, or something, and believe that you're out of the wood. You've got to heed me, and then I've got to heed you; and then you may be allowed to go to bed. As for Miss Forrester, she has had a good deal to endure lately and has stood under a pretty dark shadow, though, thank Heaven, her blessed innocence never allowed her to feel the cloud. Anybody else might have wondered at your misery, and for that matter she did; but she little guessed the reason and she never must—remember that. However, we'll come to her. Now I start."

John put down his cigar and perceived his listener was collected and in a condition to follow the argument with a mind at rest.

"When you told me that you had killed Miss Maydew," he began, "you told me a great deal more than the fact. Utterly ignorant as you probably are of criminal psychology—like most of the other writing chaps who invent murder stories—you overlooked certain very obvious indications of your own character which you had already presented to me. I'd studied you very carefully long before your confession. You will never commit a murder, Mr. Maydew. You can take it from me your talents will never rise to that. William was perfectly right when he told me you would find it hard to kill a wasp, let alone an old woman. Moreover, you are highly intelligent—an intellectual man—the last who would be likely to let any futile passion for revenge obscure your outlook, or run you into a capital crime. A Slav, or Latin 'intellectual' might; not an Anglo-Saxon. Our 'high-brows' are a meek and mild crew, except with the pen.

"Beyond that you are naturally honest. You lied badly, obviously, absurdly. Had you been already under my suspicion as the probable murderer of Miss Maydew, I should have let you out after your confession. But, of course, a great deal more than evidence of your own innocence accompanied your statement. I knew in two minutes that you never killed your aunt; but somebody had certainly done so, and what did you do? You made it exceedingly clear that you knew, or thought you knew, the culprit!

"What followed? Your terror was laid bare under my eyes and your suspicion appeared. There only existed one person in the world for you who would create such confusion. For none else on God's earth would you have been prepared to take on your shoulders a crime of this magnitude, or confess it to me. Love blinds in more ways than one. It actually blinded you in the vital particular of your sweetheart's innocence; and that, of course, proved that evidence of the most terrific character confronted you. Only such evidence could have forced you to your conviction against years of devotion and experience and love. You'll tell me about that presently. A secret between us for ever, remember; but a secret that it will be essential I should know for the satisfaction of the law.

"The evidence that convinced your reason against your heart must have been prodigious, for it conquered reality, as doubtless it was meant to do. You know Juanita Forrester better than anybody else in the world. You shared the common

knowledge of her extraordinary distinction—her rare warm heart—her generosity —her sympathy with all who were unhappy or downtrodden. I've heard it echoed on every side, from the bailiff to the bootboy. And beyond that, you knew her inner soul and had won her confidence and worship. From you nothing was hidden; yet where the rest of the world scorned the possibility of evil breathed in connection with her name, you found yourself convinced that she was a murderess! That's interesting and shows how, as I said just now, love blinds in more ways than one. It's because love, like conscience, makes us cowards, Mr. Maydew."

He paused for a moment, but lifted his hand for silence when the other was about to speak.

"Listen a little longer. We've nearly done with the first act," continued John. "Well, I knew, while you told your story, that you were innocent, but believed your sweetheart guilty. I felt tempted then and there to undeceive you, so far as your attempt to delude me was concerned; but business is business and I saw, of course, that the truth might be as your secret terror prompted you to fear. I could not yet feel positive that you were mistaken; and so I fell in with your transparent little plot, named my price, and took your money. It was understood that I should pretend to work and presently throw up the sponge and retire beaten. The interesting and original thing is that I might actually have retired beaten had it not been for your efforts to choke me off! They were, of course, full of invaluable information.

"I obeyed you, save in one particular. Instead of pretending to work, I did work, and my work swiftly convinced me that your fears were folly. I longed to tell you, boy. The hardest thing in the case was to keep my mouth shut to you and let you go on thinking that the girl you loved was a murderess even for one hour. But I'll be frank. I couldn't trust you. It was better you wilted a little longer and left her wondering. Because, you see, your Juanita was safe enough. She puzzled and she troubled, but nothing to hurt; while somebody else, who mattered a great deal more than either of you, had to receive my respectful consideration; and that was the doer of the deed. One didn't want to create any uneasiness in that quarter."

"Good heavens! You knew?"

"No; I guessed; but I didn't know. But after I'd seen Mr. Fosdike, the lawyer, I began to feel tolerably sure. Now hear what you can do to help me."

"How should I help? I wish I could."

"Tell me exactly what made you so terribly sure that your sweetheart, and nobody else, had killed Miss Maydew. I attach the very greatest importance to this information, so take your time and give me every detail."

Vincent Maydew collected his thoughts and then spoke. "I come out of this darned badly," he began.

"Not so badly as you tried to, however."

"The facts are these. After my Aunt Mary declared her intentions against me, Juanita and I sat tight for a day or two and hoped that she would change her mind, grow calmer and allow reason to work with her. However, she never

changed her mind, and reason was not her strong suit at any time. She sent for Fosdike and told us, on the night of her death, that she had made a new will and left everything to her brother. When she had gone to bed and before I went upstairs to pack before an early start on the following day, Juanita, for once in her life was really angry. She cut loose and cried out that the old woman was a monster and dead to every decent human feeling. Her abstract sense of justice prompted her, rather than her indignation for me, or her own personal disappointment. She railed against Miss Maydew and declared that she would leave her instantly and never see her again. She had actually planned to leave the house on the following morning with me, and she thought me rather mean for pleading against such a natural action. We differed, but we didn't quarrel. I looked ahead and still hoped that a thing done in anger might be cancelled presently, if neither of us took any hasty step to make a change of front impossible. Juanita at last allowed me to persuade her. She consented to stop, at least for a time, and await events. Then she went to bed."

"One moment. When you speak of a 'personal disappointment' for Miss Forrester, you mean that, under the old will, she enjoyed a considerable bequest, while the new will contained no mention of her?"

"Yes; at dinner, when she told us what she had done, my aunt specially mentioned to Juanita that she had withdrawn her promised legacy. The amount I do not know, neither did Juanita, but she had reason to believe it handsome."

"It was ten thousand pounds," said Mr. Ringrose.

"Was it? Well, I'm probably wrong when I speak of 'personal disappointment,' for my girl certainly did not think of herself that night. She only thought of justice and the wicked wrong to me after long years of steadfast support to my aunt, and my patience and consideration and so on. I had really tried to win the old woman, and had studied her pleasure in a thousand ways. They say every artist has a good slice of feminine make-up in him, and, at any rate, I thought I understood Aunt Mary and could sympathise with her difficulties of character and see the best side of her. When the smash came, Juanita remembered these things and they made her furious on my account. She went to bed angry—honestly angry—and my mind was left acutely conscious of such an extraordinary fact. Her Spanish blood, no doubt, and her intense love for justice.

"The next thing is this. She went to bed and so did I; but I couldn't sleep. I was terribly upset by the disaster of the day, and tossed and turned and troubled hour after hour and cudgelled my wits in vain to find some rational and intelligent way of saving the situation. Somewhere about two o'clock I thought I heard a noise in the passage, rose and looked out—just in time to see Juanita enter her room, carrying a candle in one hand and something else in the other I could not make out. I guessed that, like myself, she was sleepless, and I felt half inclined to go and see her. I wish I had done so. It might have saved me many appalling hours. But I did not, and I had forgotten the incident entirely before the shock of the morning's tragedy until she mentioned it to me many hours later.

"Then she told me exactly what she told the coroner at the inquest—how she had gone to get a book and something to eat and drink; and how she thought a

sound came from the corridor near Miss Maydew's door. She had been strange during the hours after the discovery—or so it seemed to me. A calmness and indifference that appeared foreign to her as I understood her followed the evil news. She showed no great sorrow and hardly any surprise. But there was something. I felt almost as though she found herself under the weight of a dread akin to my own—as though, perhaps, the horrible thought crossed her mind that I might be responsible! At any rate, she avoided me—doubtless in reality from a delicate feeling that I might prefer to be alone at such a time—but I was unbalanced and full of vague fears.

"Thus when opportunity came something inspired me to go into Juanita's room, when she was out of the house, and make such an examination as would doubtless presently be made by the law. I did so and found nothing to cause uneasiness until I came to the cupboard. There I found evidence of something —a splinter broken off old wood—a sort of thing to catch the eye, Ringrose. Closer search showed that a board had been displaced, and I found no difficulty in lifting it—an old, solid plank not more than three feet long. Underneath it was some white, thin material huddled up in a ball. I pulled this out, and as I did so Prince Charlie's dirk fell out of it. The thing was obviously one of Juanita's nightgowns, and the right wrist was soaked in blood.

"At that moment my mind moved queerly. It seemed that the truth was a thing of the past—that I had known for an eternity how my aunt died. I was only concerned with Juanita, and I sat on the ground and stared at the blood-stained knife and nightgown and explained to myself that my sweetheart had suffered an awful fit of temporary insanity, had done this thing and hidden the evidence, then probably forgotten all about it. I wove a theory and my mind moved as quickly as our minds move in dreams. I passed through vast arguments all tending in one direction, and after what seemed a lapse of hours I woke, as it were, wondering that nobody had come to find me. As a matter of fact, no more than five minutes had passed since I made the discovery. I restored the board to its place and took the evidence of the tragedy to my own room. And that night, when alone in this study after the household had retired, I burned the night-dress, destroying every fragment of it, and I locked up the dirk in my private desk.

"By now I had proved conclusively to myself that the deed must have been prompted by some strange freak of atavism in Juanita—an impulse awakened by my wrongs—not her own. I suspected that, in a sort of waking trance, she had done a deed which her maternal ancestors might have condoned, or themselves committed readily enough. She had remembered the museum and obtained the knife. I guessed that I had seen her returning with it, and that at a later hour she had unconsciously committed the crime, concealed the evidence, slept and awakened to suppose she had dreamed the deed—if, indeed, it remained in her memory at all. You can see how my devotion quickened my mind to explain what seemed so terribly certain.

"So it stood next day, and contact with Juanita convinced me that she knew nothing of the horrible event. To tell her what I knew was unthinkable, for she

would have insisted on making the facts public. I resolved to be dumb, therefore; but I delayed too long in a very vital particular. My first action should have been to cleanse the knife and return it to the place from which I knew it had come. This I intended to do, but two things happened on the following morning. The post brought the news that Uncle John was dead, and I guessed at once this fact destroyed the new will; then, early after breakfast, Inspector Burrows arrived and asked me if I would meet your train and invite you to stop at Greystone. He held that desirable and, though a detective in the house was the very last thing I desired, I dared not say so without rousing suspicions in the policeman's mind.

"No opportunity to visit the library secretly occurred until the time had come to go to the station. I went on my motor-bicycle, met you, and invited you to Greystone. I didn't think you were coming. I meant, however, to get the knife back, and that night determined to secure the card from the museum so that nothing should appear to be missing. I had meant to go after everybody was asleep in the small hours, and judged that to move the card would be as safe as to return the knife. But on going to bed I slept like the dead and didn't wake up till the first glimmer of dawn. I started at once for the card, but it was too late. You were actually in the museum, and unseen by you, from the gallery, I observed you at the centre case and saw you read the empty card. Then I cleared out, leaving you unaware that I'd seen your action."

Ringrose nodded.

"I can pretty well guess the rest," he said.

"Nobody will ever guess what the next twenty-four hours meant to me," replied the young man. "I suffered the torments of hell, for I knew, as surely as I was alive, that you would get to the bottom of it with such a clue. You somehow inspired me with an infernal certainty that Juanita was doomed sooner or later. Not reason, but terror, for you had no real clue. But my nerve was gone, and at last I determined upon taking the blame and cutting the ground from under your feet by confessing to the murder myself. It seemed a safe way out for her, and I didn't appreciate how mad it was likely to look from your point of view. You didn't give me a chance to appreciate it, for that matter. You deceived me into thinking that I had deceived you."

"What we call a double-cross, Mr. Maydew."

"Nothing matters now," replied the younger; "but I thought I'd got you, and that the money had done the trick. I ought to apologise, I suppose, but by Heaven! you've earned the money all right in your own way."

The elder smiled.

"Now it's my turn," he said. "I haven't much imagination maybe, yet quite enough to see how this looked to you and what a cleft stick you found yourself in. You argued very well, and being a literary man with a poetic turn of mind, you did pretty much what one might have expected. But you're no actor, Mr. Maydew, and as I've told you, your own yarn stultified itself. I knew what you were after, and that reduced the problem. You thought your sweetheart had done the deed—that was clear. The next thing for me to do was to find out if you

were right. I found out you were wrong. That's where intuition came in. A dangerous thing intuition—if you use it to fight against reason, as so many clever people often do—but a mighty useful gift in its place.

"The problem was to find out whether any motive existed for the murder of Miss Maydew in her companion's mind. Did Miss Forrester gain by it? If you and she had heard of John Maydew's death before the murder, then one saw at once that a good deal was gained. But neither of you had heard. Therefore, to kill her mistress was to lose any future chance of changing the situation for the better. Such an act could only be performed by a certain type of character. It argued a tempest of uncontrolled passion and a lust for immediate revenge at any cost. Nothing more unlikely to overtake Miss Forrester seemed possible. Her attitude to the affair was quite in keeping with the situation. She pretended nothing she did not feel. She continued to be herself. Her only cause for distraction, apart from the natural horror of such an event, was your behaviour. She knew you so well, and she could not understand the way you took it, especially after you learned the will was inoperative owing to your uncle having died before it was made. That puzzled her very much and she told me so. Then she discovered the loose board in her dress cupboard and showed it to me. I, of course, had seen it for myself long before, and showed her the piece of tape I had taken from it—the tape from the card in the museum as it turned out. That you had overlooked with the other more terrible clues in your hand.

"I was quite sure that she knew nothing whatever. She's the sort of girl whose native quality looks out of her wonderful eyes. To kill an old woman for revenge was absolutely beyond her power, even if she'd been born a Borgia. What followed? Why, that somebody unknown had been at amazing pains to plant the crime on Miss Juanita. I guessed at once where you had probably found the knife. But what had led you to search for it, or imagine she was involved, I did not know until you told me.

"The knife, then, was put there—to be found—not by you, but by those who would presently search Greystone; and the splinter was deliberately torn off the board to challenge attention. Without that accident, the floor of the cupboard would not have arrested any eye.

"So I found the fun really beginning, from my point of view. And there, if you please, I'll stop to-night. The first act's ended. To-morrow will see the second act played, and you have told me important things that should help in certain rather vital particulars. I must fit your information into its place and see whether it supports my present theory, or if at any point it upsets it. I hope not, and I think not. Meantime, be at rest and feel neither shame for your falsehoods nor fear for the future. I may be right, or I may be entirely mistaken; but after the funeral to-morrow it is quite possible, with a pinch of luck, that the second and third acts can both be played."

Ringrose shook the lover's hand, and with many expressions of gratitude and thanksgiving, Vincent Maydew bade him good-night.

The following day brought the funeral of Miss Maydew, and large numbers, attracted by curiosity rather than esteem, crowded the little country church-

yard. For human beings will go far and take no little pains to look at the outside of a coffin wherein lies a murdered man or woman.

Vincent and Juanita attended the ceremony, while the whole of the Greystone staff were also present. Inspector Burrows and his constables found enough to do to regulate the traffic and preserve decency; while Ringrose availed himself of a house practically empty to pursue certain investigations inspired by young Maydew's last statement and his own deductions upon it.

For more than an hour Greystone was deserted, save for a caretaker in the kitchen and John himself. He had purposely offered to remain and promised Maydew to watch the front of the premises while they should be empty. His purpose, however, demanded absolute secrecy, and, to ensure it, he entered the kitchen five minutes after the last coach had left the front door, and bade the under-gardener, left in charge, to convey a telegram for him to the post-office. The young man raised no demur, since it was understood that Ringrose now ruled. Glad enough to leave the deserted mansion, the youth set out, and was gone three parts of an hour.

And on the return of the little funeral party, Ringrose left the house for Twambley and enjoyed a long interview with Inspector Burrows.

He returned in the afternoon and sought the society of Vincent and Juanita, after chatting with the servants and hearing from them all particulars of the funeral and the sightseers.

All the staff appeared cheerful. Indeed, the very house seemed to have gained a new and more exhilarating atmosphere with the departure of its defunct mistress. Again the trio took their dinner together, and the meal, despite the melancholy business of that day, showed Vincent Maydew in a happier mood.

He alluded to the affairs of his uncle, not mentioned until then. John Maydew had died somewhat suddenly of physical mischief resulting from intemperance. His death had not surprised his physician, and his affairs presented no complications save a body of debt, which his nephew had made immediate arrangements to cancel. Two days later would see his funeral, and young Maydew proposed to attend it.

Later in the evening John and his host took their way to the little study, and the detective, after half an hour in the united company of the lovers, begged Juanita to retire.

"I don't like to separate you," he said, "but I'm off to-morrow morning, and I must have a serious talk with Mr. Maydew to-night. You go to bed, Miss Forrester, and go to sleep."

Juanita kissed Vincent, and he opened the door for her. Then he returned and expressed regret that his guest was about to depart so soon.

"Your theory has broken down, I suppose," he said. "I hated the sight of you till yesterday, Ringrose, but now I love the sight of you, and I want you to promise to be my friend."

"A promise I'll make and keep," replied the other heartily enough. "But I've not gone yet, and my theory has not broken down, and several rather startling

things are going to happen before I'm off to-morrow. You're in for another bad night. However, there's no escape from that."

He looked at his watch.

"Dr. Forbes will be here in ten minutes or so; but we'll get on from where we left off yesterday. A lot has happened to me since then."

"Dr. Forbes? Why have you sent for him?" asked the other.

"Because, unless I miss my guess, somebody's going to want him badly before very long."

"Not Juanita?"

"No, no! I hope Miss Forrester will sleep soundly and not wake up till to-morrow morning. And I think she will. You've taken a tidy lot off her mind by coming back to your old cheerful self. Now follow me as closely as you can. Last night we had only finished with you and your sweetheart, but there were three persons open to suspicion in the house besides yourself and Miss Forrester. And all three, by the way, had spoken to me with the warmest affection and regard for her. Well, what about these three old servants associated with Greystone for a great many years? I put it to myself this way. There had been a big thing happen in the house, and William, waiting at table and enjoying the confidence of all concerned, knew all about the row and the consequence. Through him, his wife, and Jane, the cook, would also know about it. He'd heard of the quarrel and knew it was a grim reality, for he'd been one of the witnesses to the new will.

"I had a chat with him on that subject and found him, though full of talk about every other matter, reticent as to that. He'd known what was in the will, because his mistress had told him; but he'd not, of course, read the will when he attested Miss Maydew's signature. Asked by me whether Miss Forrester was interested in the new will, he replied that he had no idea. All he could say was that Miss Maydew had disinherited you.

"I'd already intended to see Mr. Fosdike and study both the old will and the new, and I did so two days ago and found out an exceedingly interesting fact. You had told me that Miss Forrester was remembered in the earlier will, and I informed you of the amount last night. She was to have had ten thousand pounds, and there were other legacies under the first will. Among them—"

Ringrose was interrupted, for William opened the door and announced Dr. Forbes. The physician entered, beat some snow off his overcoat and demanded to know the purpose of the message that brought him; but he was not immediately answered. Maydew bade William fetch spirits and siphons, and when he had done so and withdrawn, both men turned to the detective.

"It's like this, doctor," explained John. "A weak heart is a weak heart, and there's a weak heart beating in the breast of somebody in this house to-night. That same heart is going to get a very ugly shock at exactly ten-thirty. That's within half an hour from the present time. The shock will be severe and I'm a merciful sort of man, so I judged you would be better on the spot, and left the note for you accordingly. Now let me finish what I was saying to Mr. Maydew, please. You brought your bag, I see."

"I did, Ringrose," replied Forbes.

"Thank you. I was telling Mr. Maydew about his aunt's former will. She'd remembered one or two old people in it at the direction of her late father; and some of these had already received their bequests and were eliminated by codicil. But four legatees remained, including Miss Forrester, while in the new will all four had been omitted. The point of interest was, first, the size of the legacies, secondly, the fact that the legatees must know their money had gone. William and his wife, Ann, were down for five thousand pounds jointly; Mrs. Woodhouse, the cook, got one thousand."

"How do you know that they knew they were out?" asked Maydew.

"For the best of reasons. William was brought in to witness the testator's signature. He knew that he and his wife were in the old will for five thousand, for he told Miss Forrester so long ago; but now he knew that since he witnessed her will, he could be no longer in it. Moreover it was so exceedingly short that he might have read it if it wasn't actually covered when he signed. And Fosdike says it was not, and I doubt not he read every word.

"Now what might a facer like that have done for William? He was a self-controlled man before his betters, but I found that, behind the scenes, he had a devil of a temper and ruled with a rod of iron. His heart's groggy and it was understood as a sort of unwritten law by his wife and Jane that he must never be crossed. Even with me he had some ado, when I bothered him, to be civil. There is temper in his eyes. I began to see light. Things happened—and, as I looked at the growing theory, it developed.

"In a case of this sort the detective, if he's wise, will attempt to get into the skin of the suspected person and consider the situation from his point of view. Here was William quietly going on with his life; but, assuming he'd had a hand in this affair, how was he thinking and feeling? Well, obviously he must have been the most puzzled man on God's earth. For how did things look to him? He'd been devilish careful to say nothing but what was true touching Miss Forrester. He'd absolved her and his new master; he'd also whitewashed his wife and the cook, and, of course, himself, in a logical and reasonable fashion. But assuming, for argument's sake, that, in a sudden fury to be revenged on her, he'd killed the old woman, who'd robbed him of his legacy at a stroke, then what had he done afterwards?

"What he had apparently done was to plant the weapon and other evidence in Miss Forrester's bedroom at the first opportunity following the crime. That argued careful preparation. He had to make that cubby hole in the cupboard, and he had to be free to do it. Nothing was easier. He could have spent an hour in her bedroom any day, when she was out and his wife and Jane down below. That William did; but whether he got a nightdress actually prepared before the murder or after, we don't know yet. I think after. At any rate, the point is that, in that disordered house on the morning after the murder, he had fifty opportunities to slip into Miss Forrester's room and plant the clues. And here's a side question for you, doctor. What's wrong with Mr. Jay at this moment?"

"He's got a large tumour on his left forearm."

"Could you say what produced it?"

"Impossible now—poison of some sort."

"A good, deep cut might have done it?"

"Yes, if the wound had suppurated."

"Then I'll go on.

"Now I'm William," continued Ringrose. "I've killed Miss Maydew and worked off the incriminating evidence where it can't well be missed by the police, though it will look as if it had been carefully hidden, of course. And what next? I—as William—find first that my manufactured evidence has been apparently overlooked by the professional detective altogether; and then I find it's gone! I am now in a quandary. But light is presently thrown on my darkness. I find the dirk back in the museum. That proves to my mind that John Ringrose did not discover it, but somebody else did. That must leave William horribly mystified; but, of course, he's powerless and daren't pretend he knows anything. He was quite clever about it, however, and called my attention to Prince Charlie's dirk and the new piece of string; but that was all he could do. Since then, no doubt, he's been living in hope that I was on a wrong tack. And he's very glad I've failed and am leaving to-morrow."

Vincent Maydew stared.

"Jay!" he cried.

"Yes. An ingenious man, but a ferocious temper was always simmering under that restrained exterior, and Fate unfortunately liberated it. He probably killed the old woman for revenge—perhaps told her so before he struck; but the plot to involve Miss Forrester, shows far more than mere passion and hate under a cruel disappointment. He's a bad old devil under his skin. I'll forgive anybody who forfeits his life for the luxury of a murder; but it's hard to forgive one who played the game as William played it and then wanted to have his cake and eat it, too, at an innocent woman's expense.

"The nightdress solved the problem, Mr. Maydew. You see what it told me? Perhaps not; but it was this. William had got the hiding-place in Miss Forrester's bedroom ready before he wanted it, no doubt. But what was going into it? The dirk, of course, and the bit of tape. But with the actual murder came another inspiration. The nightdress. And why? In my mind's eye I saw Mr. Jay commit the crime. It was a short business. He'd slip out of his bed, do the deed and be back under five minutes. But what happened? The blood. He found his pyjama jacket sleeve red. That gave him the inspiration. So, when you told me of the nightdress and the red, right sleeve, I thought of William's pyjamas. They might have gone the way of the nightdress and be burned, or they might not. I happened to remember they were not. When you were at the funeral and the house was empty, I looked for them—where? Not in William's bedroom, but in his wife's work-basket. I'd seen her mending a pyjama jacket, you see. William had met with an accident and burned the right sleeve—so she explained and so no doubt he told her. But, after the nightdress story, I knew that he'd cut away the right sleeve and burned the edge of the cut. It fitted in. He's wearing the pyjama jacket again—with the right sleeve mended.

"And one more sweet touch. I found the splinter! I found it in William's morning jacket. But not in the pocket. He'd put it in the breast pocket when he broke the board, and been much surprised, no doubt, to find it gone later when he came to destroy it. And why did he find it gone? Because it had dropped through a hole in the lining and was at the bottom edge of the coat safe and sound. He'd put on his best for the funeral, and his coat was hanging on a peg behind his bedroom door. Feeling the lower pocket, I touched something hard in the lining and in half a minute the splinter was in my hand. Things will slip down from a worn pocket like that. I've known it happen to myself.

"So there you are. He killed her for revenge, because she'd forgotten the legacy and ruled him out; though Mr. Fosdike thinks she quite meant to put him and his wife and Jane back afterwards; and he plotted to land Miss Forrester when the deed was done. It's a clever murder enough in its little way, and he had some good touches. The most masterly thing he did was to praise Miss Forrester so heartily. The temptation to drop a word of doubt in my ear must have been considerable, but he withstood it. And now Burrows and the constable ought to be at the back door."

As Vincent explained these things for the benefit of a bewildered doctor, there came a muffled scream in the passage and the men rose. A moment later Jane Woodhouse rushed into the room.

"The police!" she cried. "Mr. Burrows and my brother-in-law have just come in and arrested William for the murder, and he's fallen lumpus in a faint, and Ann's going mad!"

"Your bag, doctor," suggested John, and a moment later all hastened to the kitchen.

They found the police striving to restore William Jay, only to hear from Dr. Forbes that the little man had passed beyond reach of law, or physic.

At his wholly unexpected arrest he had leapt from his chair and in half a minute succumbed. Dr. Forbes quickly found that the widow needed all his care.

To John Ringrose's satisfaction, Ann Jay, an hour later, was able to add a measure of testimony to the circumstantial evidence responsible for her husband's death. She had been fully conscious that his mind was clouded and, by many bitter and blasphemous speeches, he had indirectly led her to fear that he was involved in the crime. He had lived to appreciate its futility and to know that his legacy was safe with Vincent Maydew. Asked concerning her husband's wound, she explained it.

"He told me a knife fell from a shelf and stabbed him," she said; but Ringrose perceived the bearing of this incident and knew the wound self-inflicted.

"He wanted blood for the nightdress which he'd taken from Miss Forrester's chest of drawers," he explained to Inspector Burrows, the doctor, and Maydew, when they were alone; "and there was no tap to turn on but his own. He cut himself, therefore, and he cut pretty deep. Then the wound gave trouble and didn't heal."

. . . . . .

John Ringrose left Twambley on the following morning and spoke a last few words to Vincent Maydew before he did so. "I shall be down again for the inquest when it finishes," he said, "and then all's cleared up. Meantime, one thing. On your life never breathe a word of what you've been through to Miss Forrester. The facts she has got to know, of course; but the inference, that has given you such a hell of a time, must be hidden from her for evermore. That's easy. Your gloom was caused by the horrible discovery that somebody was plotting against her—no more than that."

"Trust me there. I'd rather die than that she should hear what I feared. And—you—how can I thank you, Ringrose?"

"Why should you? I'll take one of those cigars, please, for the journey. And I'll say one thing more. Believe me, I was never better pleased to cut a knot than this. Here, by the way, is your cheque."

He handed it to Vincent, who pressed it back upon him.

"At least keep that. I'd thankfully double it. You've saved two lives."

Mr. Ringrose laughed, folded the cheque into a spill, walked to the fire, and thrust it in. Then he lighted his cigar with it.

"I can burn money as well as the best, you see!" he said. "There's Mr. Burrows and the Ford coming up the drive. My respects to your lady. And bear up—bear up! Good-bye, my lad, and Heaven bless you both."

Robert Barr

THE ABSENT-MINDED COTERIE

Episode from The Triumphs of Eugène Valmont

D. Appleton & Company

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Some years ago I enjoyed the unique experience of pursuing a man for one crime, and getting evidence against him of another. He was innocent of the misdemeanour, the proof of which I sought, but was guilty of another most serious offence, yet he and his confederates escaped scot free in circumstances which I now purpose to relate.

You may remember that in Rudyard Kipling's story, *Dedalia Herodsfoot*, the unfortunate woman's husband ran the risk of being arrested as a simple drunkard, at a moment when the blood of murder was upon his boots. The case of Ralph Summertrees was rather the reverse of this. The English authorities were trying to fasten upon him a crime almost as important as murder, while I was

collecting evidence which proved him guilty of an action much more momentous than that of drunkenness.

The English authorities have always been good enough, when they recognise my existence at all, to look down upon me with amused condescension. If to-day you ask Spenser Hale, of Scotland Yard, what he thinks of Eugène Valmont, that complacent man will put on the superior smile which so well becomes him, and if you are a very intimate friend of his, he may draw down the lid of his right eye, as he replies:

"Oh, yes, a very decent fellow, Valmont, but he's a Frenchman," as if, that said, there was no need of further enquiry.

Myself, I like the English detective very much, and if I were to be in a *mêlée* to-morrow, there is no man I would rather find beside me than Spenser Hale. In any situation where a fist that can fell an ox is desirable, my friend Hale is a useful companion, but for intellectuality, mental acumen, finesse—ah, well! I am the most modest of men, and will say nothing.

It would amuse you to see this giant come into my room during an evening, on the bluff pretence that he wishes to smoke a pipe with me. There is the same difference between this good-natured giant and myself as exists between that strong black pipe of his and my delicate cigarette, which I smoke feverishly when he is present, to protect myself from the fumes of his terrible tobacco. I look with delight upon the huge man, who, with an air of the utmost good humour, and a twinkle in his eye as he thinks he is twisting me about his finger, vainly endeavours to obtain a hint regarding whatever case is perplexing him at that moment. I baffle him with the ease that an active greyhound eludes the pursuit of a heavy mastiff, then at last I say to him with a laugh:

"Come, *mon ami* Hale, tell me all about it, and I will help you if I can."

Once or twice at the beginning he shook his massive head, and replied the secret was not his. The last time he did this I assured him that what he said was quite correct, and then I related full particulars of the situation in which he found himself, excepting the names, for these he had not mentioned. I had pieced together his perplexity from scraps of conversation in his half-hour's fishing for my advice, which, of course, he could have had for the plain asking. Since that time he has not come to me except with cases he feels at liberty to reveal, and one or two complications I have happily been enabled to unravel for him.

But, staunch as Spenser Hale holds the belief that no detective service on earth can excel that centring in Scotland Yard, there is one department of activity in which even he confesses that Frenchmen are his masters, although he somewhat grudgingly qualifies his admission by adding that we in France are constantly allowed to do what is prohibited in England. I refer to the minute search of a house during the owner's absence. If you read that excellent story, entitled *The Purloined Letter*, by Edgar Allan Poe, you will find a record of the kind of thing I mean, which is better than any description I, who have so often taken part in such a search, can set down.

Now, these people among whom I live are proud of their phrase, "The

Englishman's house is his castle," and into that castle even a policeman cannot penetrate without a legal warrant. This may be all very well in theory, but if you are compelled to march up to a man's house, blowing a trumpet, and rattling a snare drum, you need not be disappointed if you fail to find what you are in search of when all the legal restrictions are complied with. Of course, the English are a very excellent people, a fact to which I am always proud to bear testimony, but it must be admitted that for cold common sense the French are very much their superiors. In Paris, if I wish to obtain an incriminating document, I do not send the possessor a *carte postale* to inform him of my desire, and in this procedure the French people sanely acquiesce. I have known men who, when they go out to spend an evening on the boulevards, toss their bunch of keys to the concierge, saying:

"If you hear the police rummaging about while I'm away, pray assist them, with an expression of my distinguished consideration."

I remember while I was a chief detective in the service of the French Government being requested to call at a certain hour at the private hotel of the Minister for Foreign Affairs. It was during the time that Bismarck meditated a second attack upon my country, and I am happy to say that I was then instrumental in supplying the Secret Bureau with documents which mollified that iron man's purpose, a fact which I think entitled me to my country's gratitude, not that I ever even hinted such a claim when a succeeding ministry forgot my services. The memory of a republic, as has been said by a greater man than I, is short. However, all that has nothing to do with the incident I am about to relate. I merely mention the crisis to excuse a momentary forgetfulness on my part which in any other country might have been followed by serious results to myself. But in France—ah, we understand those things, and nothing happened.

I am the last person in the world to give myself away, as they say in the great West. I am usually the calm, collected Eugène Valmont whom nothing can perturb, but this was a time of great tension, and I had become absorbed. I was alone with the minister in his private house, and one of the papers he desired was in his bureau at the Ministry for Foreign Affairs; at least, he thought so, and said:

"Ah, it is in my desk at the bureau. How annoying! I must send for it!"

"No, Excellency," I cried, springing up in a self-oblivion the most complete, "it is here." Touching the spring of a secret drawer, I opened it, and taking out the document he wished, handed it to him.

It was not until I met his searching look, and saw the faint smile on his lips, that I realised what I had done.

"Valmont," he said quietly, "on whose behalf did you search my house?"

"Excellency," I replied in tones no less agreeable than his own, "to-night at your orders I pay a domiciliary visit to the mansion of Baron Dumoulaine, who stands high in the estimation of the President of the French Republic. If either of those distinguished gentlemen should learn of my informal call and should

ask me in whose interests I made the domiciliary visit, what is it you wish that I should reply?"

"You should reply, Valmont, that you did it in the interests of the Secret Service."

"I shall not fail to do so, Excellency, and in answer to your question just now, I had the honour of searching this mansion in the interests of the Secret Service of France."

The Minister for Foreign Affairs laughed; a hearty laugh that expressed no resentment.

"I merely wished to compliment you, Valmont, on the efficiency of your search, and the excellence of your memory. This is indeed the document which I thought was left in my office."

I wonder what Lord Lansdowne would say if Spenser Hale showed an equal familiarity with his private papers! But now that we have returned to our good friend Hale, we must not keep him waiting any longer.

. . . . . .

I well remember the November day when I first heard of the Summertrees case, because there hung over London a fog so thick that two or three times I lost my way, and no cab was to be had at any price. The few cabmen then in the streets were leading their animals slowly along, making for their stables. It was one of those depressing London days which filled me with ennui and a yearning for my own clear city of Paris, where, if we are ever visited by a slight mist, it is at least clean, white vapour, and not this horrible London mixture saturated with suffocating carbon. The fog was too thick for any passer to read the contents bills of the newspapers plastered on the pavement, and as there were probably no races that day the newsboys were shouting what they considered the next most important event—the election of an American President. I bought a paper and thrust it into my pocket. It was late when I reached my flat, and, after dining there, which was an unusual thing for me to do, I put on my slippers, took an easy-chair before the fire, and began to read my evening journal. I was distressed to learn that the eloquent Mr. Bryan had been defeated. I knew little about the silver question, but the man's oratorical powers had appealed to me, and my sympathy was aroused because he owned many silver mines, and yet the price of the metal was so low that apparently he could not make a living through the operation of them. But of course, the cry that he was a plutocrat, and a reputed millionaire over and over again, was bound to defeat him in a democracy where the average voter is exceedingly poor and not comfortably well-to-do as is the case with our peasants in France. I always took great interest in the affairs of the huge republic to the west, having been at some pains to inform myself accurately regarding its politics, and although, as my readers know, I seldom quote anything complimentary that is said of me, nevertheless, an American client of mine once admitted that he never knew the true inwardness—I think that was the phrase he used—of American politics

until he heard me discourse upon them. But then, he added, he had been a very busy man all his life.

I had allowed my paper to slip to the floor, for in very truth the fog was penetrating even into my flat, and it was becoming difficult to read, notwithstanding the electric light. My man came in, and announced that Mr. Spenser Hale wished to see me, and, indeed, any night, but especially when there is rain or fog outside, I am more pleased to talk with a friend than to read a newspaper.

"*Mon Dieu*, my dear Monsieur Hale, it is a brave man you are to venture out in such a fog as is abroad to-night."

"Ah, Monsieur Valmont," said Hale with pride, "you cannot raise a fog like this in Paris!"

"No. There you are supreme," I admitted, rising and saluting my visitor, then offering him a chair.

"I see you are reading the latest news," he said, indicating my newspaper. "I am very glad that man Bryan is defeated. Now we shall have better times."

I waved my hand as I took my chair again. I will discuss many things with Spenser Hale, but not American politics; he does not understand them. It is a common defect of the English to suffer complete ignorance regarding the internal affairs of other countries.

"It is surely an important thing that brought you out on such a night as this. The fog must be very thick in Scotland Yard."

This delicate shaft of fancy completely missed him, and he answered stolidly:

"It's thick all over London, and, indeed, throughout most of England."

"Yes, it is," I agreed, but he did not see that either.

Still a moment later he made a remark which, if it had come from some people I know, might have indicated a glimmer of comprehension.

"You are a very, very clever man, Monsieur Valmont, so all I need say is that the question which brought me here is the same as that on which the American election was fought. Now, to a countryman, I should be compelled to give further explanation, but to you, monsieur, that will not be necessary."

There are times when I dislike the crafty smile and partial closing of the eyes which always distinguishes Spenser Hale when he places on the table a problem which he expects will baffle me. If I said he never did baffle me, I would be wrong, of course, for sometimes the utter simplicity of the puzzles which trouble him leads me into an intricate involution entirely unnecessary in the circumstances.

I pressed my finger tips together, and gazed for a few moments at the ceiling. Hale had lit his black pipe, and my silent servant placed at his elbow the whisky and soda, then tip-toed out of the room. As the door closed my eyes came from the ceiling to the level of Hale's expansive countenance.

"Have they eluded you?" I asked quietly.

"Who?"

"The coiners."

Hale's pipe dropped from his jaw, but he managed to catch it before it reached the floor. Then he took a gulp from the tumbler.

"That was just a lucky shot," he said.

"*Parfaitement,*" I replied carelessly.

"Now, own up, Valmont, wasn't it?"

I shrugged my shoulders. A man cannot contradict a guest in his own house.

"Oh, stow that!" cried Hale impolitely. He is a trifle prone to strong and even slangy expressions when puzzled. "Tell me how you guessed it."

"It is very simple, *mon ami*. The question on which the American election was fought is the price of silver, which is so low that it has ruined Mr. Bryan, and threatens to ruin all the farmers of the west who possess silver mines on their farms. Silver troubled America, ergo silver troubles Scotland Yard.

"Very well, the natural inference is that some one has stolen bars of silver. But such a theft happened three months ago, when the metal was being unloaded from a German steamer at Southampton, and my dear friend Spenser Hale ran down the thieves very cleverly as they were trying to dissolve the marks off the bars with acid. Now crimes do not run in series, like the numbers in roulette at Monte Carlo. The thieves are men of brains. They say to themselves, What chance is there successfully to steal bars of silver while Mr. Hale is at Scotland Yard? Eh, my good friend?"

"Really, Valmont," said Hale, taking another sip, "sometimes you almost persuade me that you have reasoning powers."

"Thanks, comrade. Then it is not a *theft* of silver we have now to deal with. But the American election was fought on the *price* of silver. If silver had been high in cost, there would have been no silver question. So the crime that is bothering you arises through the low price of silver, and this suggests that it must be a case of illicit coinage, for there the low price of the metal comes in. You have, perhaps, found a more subtle illegitimate act going forward than heretofore. Some one is making your shillings and your half-crowns from real silver, instead of from baser metal, and yet there is a large profit which has not hitherto been possible through the high price of silver. With the old conditions you were familiar, but this new element sets at nought all your previous formulæ. That is how I reasoned the matter out."

"Well, Valmont, you have hit it. I'll say that for you; you have hit it. There is a gang of expert coiners who are putting out real silver money, and making a clear shilling on the half-crown. We can find no trace of the coiners, but we know the man who is shoving the stuff."

"That ought to be sufficient," I suggested.

"Yes, it should, but it hasn't proved so up to date. Now I came to-night to see if you would do one of your French tricks for us, right on the quiet."

"What French trick, Monsieur Spenser Hale?" I enquired with some asperity, forgetting for the moment that the man invariably became impolite when he grew excited.

"No offence intended," said this blundering officer, who really is a good-natured fellow, but always puts his foot in it, and then apologises. "I want some one to go through a man's house without a search warrant, spot the evi-

dence, let me know, and then we'll rush the place before he has time to hide his tracks."

"Who is this man, and where does he live?"

"His name is Ralph Summertrees, and he lives in a very natty little bijou residence, as the advertisements call it, situated in no less a fashionable street than Park Lane."

"I see. What has aroused your suspicions against him?"

"Well, you know, that's an expensive district to live in; it takes a bit of money to do the trick. This Summertrees has no ostensible business, yet every Friday he goes to the United Capital Bank in Piccadilly, and deposits a bag of swag, usually all silver coin."

"Yes, and this money?"

"This money, so far as we can learn, contains a good many of these new pieces which never saw the British Mint."

"It's not all the new coinage, then?"

"Oh, no, he's a bit too artful for that. You see, a man can go round London, his pockets filled with new coinage five-shilling pieces, buy this, that, and the other, and come home with his change in legitimate coins of the realm—half-crowns, florins, shillings, sixpences, and all that."

"I see. Then why don't you nab him one day when his pockets are stuffed with illegitimate five-shilling pieces?"

"That could be done, of course, and I've thought of it, but, you see, we want to land the whole gang. Once we arrested him, without knowing where the money came from, the real coiners would take flight."

"How do you know he is not the real coiner himself?"

Now poor Hale is as easy to read as a book. He hesitated before answering this question, and looked confused as a culprit caught in some dishonest act.

"You need not be afraid to tell me," I said soothingly after a pause. "You have had one of your men in Mr. Summertrees's house, and so learned that he is not the coiner. But your man has not succeeded in getting you evidence to incriminate other people."

"You've about hit it again, Monsieur Valmont. One of my men has been Summertrees's butler for two weeks, but, as you say, he has found no evidence."

"Is he still butler?"

"Yes."

"Now tell me how far you have got. You know that Summertrees deposits a bag of coin every Friday in the Piccadilly bank, and I suppose the bank has allowed you to examine one or two of the bags."

"Yes, sir, they have, but, you see, banks are very difficult to treat with. They don't like detectives bothering round, and whilst they do not stand out against the law, still they never answer any more questions than they're asked, and Mr. Summertrees has been a good customer at the United Capital for many years."

"Haven't you found out where the money comes from?"

"Yes, we have; it is brought there night after night by a man who looks like

a respectable city clerk, and he puts it into a large safe, of which he holds the key, this safe being on the ground floor, in the dining-room."

"Haven't you followed the clerk?"

"Yes. He sleeps in the Park Lane house every night, and goes up in the morning to an old curiosity shop in Tottenham Court Road, where he stays all day, returning with his bag of money in the evening."

"Why don't you arrest and question him?"

"Well, Monsieur Valmont, there is just the same objection to his arrest as to that of Summertrees himself. We could easily arrest both, but we have not the slightest evidence against either of them, and then, although we put the go-betweens in clink, the worst criminals of the lot would escape."

"Nothing suspicious about the old curiosity shop?"

"No. It appears to be perfectly regular."

"This game has been going on under your noses for how long?"

"For about six weeks."

"Is Summertrees a married man?"

"No."

"Are there any women servants in the house?"

"No, except that three charwomen come in every morning to do up the rooms."

"Of what is his household comprised?"

"There is the butler, then the valet, and last, the French cook."

"Ah," cried I, "the French cook! This case interests me. So Summertrees has succeeded in completely disconcerting your man? Has he prevented him going from top to bottom of the house?"

"Oh, no, he has rather assisted him than otherwise. On one occasion he went to the safe, took out the money, had Podgers—that's my chap's name—help him to count it, and then actually sent Podgers to the bank with the bag of coin."

"And Podgers has been all over the place?"

"Yes."

"Saw no signs of a coining establishment?"

"No. It is absolutely impossible that any coining can be done there. Besides, as I tell you, that respectable clerk brings him the money."

"I suppose you want me to take Podgers's position?"

"Well, Monsieur Valmont, to tell you the truth, I would rather you didn't. Podgers has done everything a man can do, but I thought if you got into the house, Podgers assisting, you might go through it night after night at your leisure."

"I see. That's just a little dangerous in England. I think I should prefer to assure myself the legitimate standing of being the amiable Podgers's successor. You say that Summertrees has no business?"

"Well, sir, not what you might call a business. He is by way of being an author, but I don't count that any business."

"Oh, an author, is he? When does he do his writing?"

"He locks himself up most of the day in his study."

"Does he come out for lunch?"

"No; he lights a little spirit lamp inside, Podgers tells me, and makes himself a cup of coffee, which he takes with a sandwich or two."

"That's rather frugal fare for Park Lane."

"Yes, Monsieur Valmont, it is, but he makes it up in the evening, when he has a long dinner with all them foreign kickshaws you people like, done by his French cook."

"Sensible man! Well, Hale, I see I shall look forward with pleasure to making the acquaintance of Mr. Summertrees. Is there any restriction on the going and coming of your man Podgers?"

"None in the least. He can get away either night or day."

"Very good, friend Hale, bring him here to-morrow, as soon as our author locks himself up in his study, or rather, I should say, as soon as the respectable clerk leaves for Tottenham Court Road, which I should guess, as you put it, is about half an hour after his master turns the key of the room in which he writes."

"You are quite right in that guess, Valmont. How did you hit it?"

"Merely a surmise, Hale. There is a good deal of oddity about that Park Lane house, so it doesn't surprise me in the least that the master gets to work earlier in the morning than the man. I have also a suspicion that Ralph Summertrees knows perfectly well what the estimable Podgers is there for."

"What makes you think that?"

"I can give no reason except that my opinion of the acuteness of Summertrees has been gradually rising all the while you were speaking, and at the same time my estimate of Podgers's craft has been as steadily declining. However, bring the man here to-morrow, that I may ask him a few questions."

. . . . . .

Next day, about eleven o'clock, the ponderous Podgers, hat in hand, followed his chief into my room. His broad, impassive, immobile smooth face gave him rather more the air of a genuine butler than I had expected, and this appearance, of course, was enhanced by his livery. His replies to my questions were those of a well-trained servant's who will not say too much unless it is made worth his while. All in all, Podgers exceeded my expectations, and really my friend Hale had some justification for regarding him, as he evidently did, a triumph in his line.

"Sit down, Mr. Hale, and you, Podgers."

The man disregarded my invitation, standing like a statue until his chief made a motion; then he dropped into a chair. The English are great on discipline.

"Now, Mr. Hale, I must first congratulate you on the make-up of Podgers. It is excellent. You depend less on artificial assistance than we do in France, and in that I think you are right."

"Oh, we know a bit over here, Monsieur Valmont," said Hale, with pardonable pride.

"Now then, Podgers, I want to ask you about this clerk. What time does he arrive in the evening?"

"At prompt six, sir."

"Does he ring, or let himself in with a latchkey?"

"With a latchkey, sir."

"How does he carry the money?"

"In a little locked leather satchel, sir, flung over his shoulder."

"Does he go direct to the dining-room?"

"Yes, sir."

"Have you seen him unlock the safe and put in the money?"

"Yes, sir."

"Does the safe unlock with a word or a key?"

"With a key, sir. It's one of the old-fashioned kind."

"Then the clerk unlocks his leather money bag?"

"Yes, sir."

"That's three keys used within as many minutes. Are they separate or in a bunch?"

"In a bunch, sir."

"Did you ever see your master with this bunch of keys?"

"No, sir."

"You saw him open the safe once, I am told?"

"Yes, sir."

"Did he use a separate key, or one of a bunch?"

Podgers slowly scratched his head, then said:

"I don't just remember, sir."

"Ah, Podgers, you are neglecting the big things in that house. Sure you can't remember?"

"No, sir."

"Once the money is in and the safe locked up, what does the clerk do?"

"Goes to his room, sir."

"Where is this room?"

"On the third floor, sir."

"Where do you sleep?"

"On the fourth floor with the rest of the servants, sir."

"Where does the master sleep?"

"On the second floor, adjoining his study."

"The house consists of four stories and a basement, does it?"

"Yes, sir."

"I have somehow arrived at the suspicion that it is a very narrow house. Is that true?"

"Yes, sir."

"Does the clerk ever dine with your master?"

"No, sir. The clerk don't eat in the house at all, sir."

"Does he go away before breakfast?"

"No, sir."

"No one takes breakfast to his room?"

"No, sir."

"What times does he leave the house?"

"At ten o'clock, sir."

"When is breakfast served?"

"At nine o'clock, sir."

"At what hour does your master retire to his study?"

"At half-past nine, sir."

"Locks the door on the inside?"

"Yes, sir."

"Never rings for anything during the day?"

"Not that I know of, sir."

"What sort of a man is he?"

Here Podgers was on familiar ground, and he rattled off a description minute in every particular.

"What I meant was, Podgers, is he silent, or talkative, or does he get angry? Does he seem furtive, suspicious, anxious, terrorised, calm, excitable, or what?"

"Well, sir, he is by way of being very quiet, never has much to say for hisself; never saw him angry, or excited."

"Now, Podgers, you've been at Park Lane for a fortnight or more. You are a sharp, alert, observant man. What happens there that strikes you as unusual?"

"Well, I can't exactly say, sir," replied Podgers, looking rather helplessly from his chief to myself, and back again.

"Your professional duties have often compelled you to enact the part of butler before, otherwise you wouldn't do it so well. Isn't that the case?"

Podgers did not reply, but glanced at his chief. This was evidently a question pertaining to the service, which a subordinate was not allowed to answer. However, Hale said at once:

"Certainly. Podgers has been in dozens of places."

"Well, Podgers, just call to mind some of the other households where you have been employed, and tell me any particulars in which Mr. Summertrees's establishment differs from them."

Podgers pondered a long time.

"Well, sir, he do stick to writing pretty close."

"Ah, that's his profession, you see, Podgers. Hard at it from half-past nine till towards seven, I imagine?"

"Yes, sir."

"Anything else, Podgers? No matter how trivial."

"Well, sir, he's fond of reading too; leastways, he's fond of newspapers."

"When does he read?"

"I've never seen him read 'em, sir; indeed, so far as I can tell, I never knew the papers to be opened, but he takes them all in, sir."

"What, all the morning papers?"

"Yes, sir, and all the evening papers too."

"Where are the morning papers placed?"

"On the table in his study, sir."

"And the evening papers?"

"Well, sir, when the evening papers come, the study is locked. They are put on a side table in the dining-room, and he takes them upstairs with him to his study."

"This has happened every day since you've been there?"

"Yes, sir."

"You reported that very striking fact to your chief, of course?"

"No, sir, I don't think I did," said Podgers, confused.

"You should have done so. Mr. Hale would have known how to make the most of a point so vital."

"Oh, come now, Valmont," interrupted Hale, "you're chaffing us. Plenty of people take in all the papers!"

"I think not. Even clubs and hotels subscribe to the leading journals only. You said *all*, I think, Podgers?"

"Well, *nearly* all, sir."

"But which is it? There's a vast difference."

"He takes a good many, sir."

"How many?"

"I don't just know, sir."

"That's easily found out, Valmont," cried Hale, with some impatience, "if you think it really important."

"I think it so important that I'm going back with Podgers myself. You can take me into the house, I suppose, when you return?"

"Oh, yes, sir."

"Coming back to these newspapers for a moment, Podgers. What is done with them?"

"They are sold to the ragman, sir, once a week."

"Who takes them from the study?"

"I do, sir."

"Do they appear to have been read very carefully?"

"Well, no, sir; leastways, some of them seem never to have been opened, or else folded up very carefully again."

"Did you notice that extracts have been clipped from any of them?"

"No, sir."

"Does Mr. Summertrees keep a scrapbook?"

"Not that I know of, sir."

"Oh, the case is perfectly plain," said I, leaning back in my chair, and regarding the puzzled Hale with that cherubic expression of self-satisfaction which I know is so annoying to him.

"*What's* perfectly plain?" he demanded, more gruffly perhaps than etiquette would have sanctioned.

"Summertrees is no coiner, nor is he linked with any band of coiners."

"What is he, then?"

"Ah, that opens another avenue of inquiry. For all I know to the contrary, he may be the most honest of men. On the surface it would appear that he is a reasonably industrious tradesman in Tottenham Court Road, who is anxious that

there should be no visible connection between a plebeian employment and so aristocratic a residence as that in Park Lane."

At this point Spenser Hale gave expression to one of those rare flashes of reason which are always an astonishment to his friends.

"That is nonsense, Monsieur Valmont," he said, "the man who is ashamed of the connection between his business and his house is one who is trying to get into Society, or else the women of his family are trying it, as is usually the case. Now Summertrees has no family. He himself goes nowhere, gives no entertainments, and accepts no invitations. He belongs to no club, therefore to say that he is ashamed of his connection with the Tottenham Court Road shop is absurd. He is concealing the connection for some other reason that will bear looking into."

"My dear Hale, the goddess of Wisdom herself could not have made a more sensible series of remarks. Now, *mon ami*, do you want my assistance, or have you enough to go on with?"

"Enough to go on with? We have nothing more than we had when I called on you last night."

"Last night, my dear Hale, you supposed this man was in league with coiners. To-day you know he is not."

"I know you *say* he is not."

I shrugged my shoulders, and raised my eyebrows, smiling at him.

"It is the same thing, Monsieur Hale."

"Well, of all the conceited——" and the good Hale could get no further.

"If you wish my assistance, it is yours."

"Very good. Not to put too fine a point upon it, I do."

"In that case, my dear Podgers, you will return to the residence of our friend Summertrees, and get together for me in a bundle all of yesterday's morning and evening papers that were delivered to the house. Can you do that, or are they mixed up in a heap in the coal cellar?"

"I can do it, sir. I have instructions to place each day's papers in a pile by itself in case they should be wanted again. There is always one week's supply in the cellar, and we sell the papers of the week before to the ragman."

"Excellent. Well, take the risk of abstracting one day's journals, and have them ready for me. I will call upon you at half-past three o'clock exactly, and then I want you to take me upstairs to the clerk's bedroom in the third story, which I suppose is not locked during the daytime?"

"No, sir, it is not."

With this the patient Podgers took his departure. Spenser Hale rose when his assistant left.

"Anything further I can do?" he asked.

"Yes; give me the address of the shop in Tottenham Court Road. Do you happen to have about you one of those new five-shilling pieces which you believe to be illegally coined?"

He opened his pocket-book, took out the bit of white metal, and handed it to me.

"I'm going to pass this off before evening," I said, putting it in my pocket, "and I hope none of your men will arrest me."

"That's all right," laughed Hale as he took his leave.

At half-past three Podgers was waiting for me, and opened the front door as I came up the steps, thus saving me the necessity of ringing. The house seemed strangely quiet. The French cook was evidently down in the basement, and we had probably all the upper part to ourselves, unless Summertrees was in his study, which I doubted. Podgers led me directly upstairs to the clerk's room on the third floor, walking on tiptoe, with an elephantine air of silence and secrecy combined, which struck me as unnecessary.

"I will make an examination of this room," I said. "Kindly wait for me down by the door of the study."

The bedroom proved to be of respectable size when one considers the smallness of the house. The bed was all nicely made up, and there were two chairs in the room, but the usual washstand and swing-mirror were not visible. However, seeing a curtain at the farther end of the room, I drew it aside, and found, as I expected, a fixed lavatory in an alcove of perhaps four feet deep by five in width. As the room was about fifteen feet wide, this left two-thirds of the space unaccounted for. A moment later, I opened a door which exhibited a closet filled with clothes hanging on hooks. This left a space of five feet between the clothes closet and the lavatory. I thought at first that the entrance to the secret stairway must have issued from the lavatory, but examining the boards closely, although they sounded hollow to the knuckles, they were quite evidently plain matchboarding, and not a concealed door. The entrance to the stairway, therefore, must issue from the clothes closet. The right hand wall proved similar to the matchboarding of the lavatory as far as the casual eye or touch was concerned, but I saw at once it was a door. The latch turned out to be somewhat ingeniously operated by one of the hooks which held a pair of old trousers. I found that the hook, if pressed upward, allowed the door to swing outward, over the stairhead. Descending to the second floor, a similar latch let me in to a similar clothes closet in the room beneath. The two rooms were identical in size, one directly above the other, the only difference being that the lower room door gave into the study, instead of into the hall, as was the case with the upper chamber.

The study was extremely neat, either not much used, or the abode of a very methodical man. There was nothing on the table except a pile of that morning's papers. I walked to the farther end, turned the key in the lock, and came out upon the astonished Podgers.

"Well, I'm blowed!" exclaimed he.

"Quite so," I rejoined, "you've been tiptoeing past an empty room for the last two weeks. Now, if you'll come with me, Podgers, I'll show you how the trick is done."

When he entered the study, I locked the door once more, and led the assumed butler, still tiptoeing through force of habit, up the stair into the top bedroom, and so out again, leaving everything exactly as we found it. We went down the main stair to the front hall, and there Podgers had my parcel of papers all neatly

wrapped up. This bundle I carried to my flat, gave one of my assistants some instructions, and left him at work on the papers.

. . . . . .

I took a cab to the foot of Tottenham Court Road, and walked up that street till I came to J. Simpson's old curiosity shop. After gazing at the well-filled windows for some time, I stepped inside, having selected a little iron crucifix displayed behind the pane; the work of some ancient craftsman.

I knew at once from Podgers's description that I was waited upon by the veritable respectable clerk who brought the bag of money each night to Park Lane, and who I was certain was no other than Ralph Summertrees himself.

There was nothing in his manner differing from that of any other quiet salesman. The price of the crucifix proved to be seven-and-six, and I threw down a sovereign to pay for it.

"Do you mind the change being all in silver, sir?" he asked, and I answered without any eagerness, although the question aroused a suspicion that had begun to be allayed:

"Not in the least."

He gave me half-a-crown, three two-shilling pieces, and four separate shillings, all the coins being well-worn silver of the realm, the undoubted inartistic product of the reputable British Mint. This seemed to dispose of the theory that he was palming off illegitimate money. He asked me if I were interested in any particular branch of antiquity, and I replied that my curiosity was merely general, and exceedingly amateurish, whereupon he invited me to look round. This I proceeded to do, while he resumed the addressing and stamping of some wrapped-up pamphlets which I surmised to be copies of his catalogue.

He made no attempt either to watch me or to press his wares upon me. I selected at random a little inkstand, and asked its price. It was two shillings, he said, whereupon I produced my fraudulent five-shilling piece. He took it, gave me the change without comment, and the last doubt about his connection with coiners flickered from my mind.

At this moment a young man came in, who, I saw at once, was not a customer. He walked briskly to the farther end of the shop, and disappeared behind a partition which had one pane of glass in it that gave an outlook towards the front door.

"Excuse me a moment," said the shopkeeper, and he followed the young man into the private office.

As I examined the curious heterogeneous collection of things for sale, I heard the clink of coins being poured out on the lid of a desk or an uncovered table, and the murmur of voices floated out to me. I was now near the entrance of the shop, and by a sleight-of-hand trick, keeping the corner of my eye on the glass pane of the private office, I removed the key of the front door without a sound, and took an impression of it in wax, returning the key to its place unobserved. At this moment another young man came in, and walked straight past me into the private office. I heard him say:

"Oh, I beg pardon, Mr. Simpson. How are you, Rogers?"

"Hallo, Macpherson," saluted Rogers, who then came out, bidding good-night to Mr. Simpson, and departed whistling down the street, but not before he had repeated his phrase to another young man entering, to whom he gave the name of Tyrrel.

I noted these three names in my mind. Two others came in together, but I was compelled to content myself with memorising their features, for I did not learn their names. These men were evidently collectors, for I heard the rattle of money in every case; yet here was a small shop, doing apparently very little business, for I had been within it for more than half an hour, and yet remained the only customer. If credit were given one collector would certainly have been sufficient, yet five had come in, and had poured their contributions into the pile Summertrees was to take home with him that night.

I determined to secure one of the pamphlets which the man had been addressing. They were piled on a shelf behind the counter, but I had no difficulty in reaching across and taking the one on top, which I slipped into my pocket. When the fifth young man went down the street Summertrees himself emerged, and this time he carried in his hand the well-filled locked leather satchel, with the straps dangling. It was now approaching half-past five, and I saw he was eager to close up and get away.

"Anything else you fancy, sir?" he asked me.

"No, or rather yes and no. You have a very interesting collection here, but it's getting so dark I can hardly see."

"I close at half-past five, sir."

"Ah, in that case," I said, consulting my watch, "I shall be pleased to call some other time."

"Thank you, sir," replied Summertrees quietly, and with that I took my leave.

From the corner of an alley on the other side of the street I saw him put up the shutters with his own hands, then he emerged with overcoat on, and the money satchel slung across his shoulder. He locked the door, tested it with his knuckles, and walked down the street, carrying under one arm the pamphlets he had been addressing. I followed him some distance, saw him drop the pamphlets into the box at the first post office he passed, and walk rapidly towards his house in Park Lane.

When I returned to my flat and called in my assistant, he said:

"After putting to one side the regular advertisements of pills, soap, and what not, here is the only one common to all the newspapers, morning and evening alike. The advertisements are not identical, sir, but they have two points of similarity, or perhaps I should say three. They all profess to furnish a cure for absent-mindedness; they all ask that the applicant's chief hobby shall be stated, and they all bear the same address: Dr. Willoughby, in Tottenham Court Road."

"Thank you," said I, as he placed the scissored advertisements before me.

I read several of the announcements. They were all small, and perhaps that is why I had never noticed one of them in the newspapers, for certainly they were odd enough. Some asked for lists of absent-minded men, with the hobbies of

each, and for these lists, prizes of from one shilling to six were offered. In other clippings Dr. Willoughby professed to be able to cure absent-mindedness. There were no fees, and no treatment, but a pamphlet would be sent, which, if it did not benefit the receiver, could do no harm. The doctor was unable to meet patients personally, nor could he enter into correspondence with them. The address was the same as that of the old curiosity shop in Tottenham Court Road. At this juncture I pulled the pamphlet from my pocket, and saw it was entitled *Christian Science and Absent Mindedness*, by Dr. Stamford Willoughby, and at the end of the article was the statement contained in the advertisements, that Dr. Willoughby would neither see patients nor hold any correspondence with them.

I drew a sheet of paper towards me, wrote to Dr. Willoughby alleging that I was a very absent-minded man, and would be glad of his pamphlet, adding that my special hobby was the collecting of first editions. I then signed myself, "Alport Webster, Imperial Flats, London, W."

I may here explain that it is often necessary for me to see people under some other name than the well-known appellation of Eugène Valmont. There are two doors to my flat, and on one of these is painted, "Eugène Valmont"; on the other there is a receptacle, into which can be slipped a sliding panel bearing any *nom de guerre* I choose. The same device is arranged on the ground floor, where the names of all the occupants of the building appear on the right-hand wall.

I sealed, addressed, and stamped my letter, then told my man to put out the name of Alport Webster, and if I did not happen to be in when any one called upon that mythical person, he was to make an appointment for me.

It was nearly six o'clock next afternoon when the card of Angus Macpherson was brought in to Mr. Alport Webster. I recognised the young man at once as the second who had entered the little shop carrying his tribute to Mr. Simpson the day before. He held three volumes under his arm, and spoke in such a pleasant, insinuating sort of way, that I knew at once he was an adept in his profession of canvasser.

"Will you be seated, Mr. Macpherson? In what can I serve you?"

He placed the three volumes, backs upward, on my table.

"Are you interested at all in first editions, Mr. Webster?"

"It is the one thing I am interested in," I replied; "but unfortunately they often run into a lot of money."

"That is true," said Macpherson sympathetically, "and I have here three books, one of which is an exemplification of what you say. This one costs a hundred pounds. The last copy that was sold by auction in London brought a hundred and twenty-three pounds. This next one is forty pounds, and the third ten pounds. At these prices I am certain you could not duplicate three such treasures in any book shop in Britain."

I examined them critically, and saw at once that what he said was true. He was still standing on the opposite side of the table.

"Please take a chair, Mr. Macpherson. Do you mean to say you go round Lon-

don with a hundred and fifty pounds worth of goods under your arm in this careless way?"

The young man laughed.

"I run very little risk, Mr. Webster. I don't suppose any one I meet imagines for a moment there is more under my arm than perhaps a trio of volumes I have picked up in the fourpenny box to take home with me."

I lingered over the volume for which he asked a hundred pounds, then said, looking across at him:

"How came you to be possessed of this book, for instance?"

He turned upon me a fine, open countenance, and answered without hesitation in the frankest possible manner:

"I am not in actual possession of it, Mr. Webster. I am by way of being a connoisseur in rare and valuable books myself, although, of course, I have little money with which to indulge in the collection of them. I am acquainted, however, with the lovers of desirable books in different quarters of London. These three volumes, for instance, are from the library of a private gentleman in the West End. I have sold many books to him, and he knows I am trustworthy. He wishes to dispose of them at something under their real value, and has kindly allowed me to conduct the negotiation. I make it my business to find out those who are interested in rare books, and by such trading I add considerably to my income."

"How, for instance, did you learn that I was a bibliophile?"

Mr. Macpherson laughed genially.

"Well, Mr. Webster, I must confess that I chanced it. I do that very often. I take a flat like this, and send in my card to the name on the door. If I am invited in, I ask the occupant the question I asked you just now: 'Are you interested in rare editions?' If he says no, I simply beg pardon and retire. If he says yes, then I show my wares."

"I see," said I, nodding. What a glib young liar he was, with that innocent face of his, and yet my next question brought forth the truth.

"As this is the first time you have called upon me, Mr. Macpherson, you have no objection to my making some further inquiry, I suppose. Would you mind telling me the name of the owner of these books in the West End?"

"His name is Mr. Ralph Summertrees, of Park Lane."

"Of Park Lane? Ah, indeed."

"I shall be glad to leave the books with you, Mr. Webster, and if you care to make an appointment with Mr. Summertrees, I am sure he will not object to say a word in my favour."

"Oh, I do not in the least doubt it, and should not think of troubling the gentleman."

"I was going to tell you," went on the young man, "that I have a friend, a capitalist, who, in a way, is my supporter; for, as I said, I have little money of my own. I find it is often inconvenient for people to pay down any considerable sum. When, however, I strike a bargain, my capitalist buys the book, and I make an arrangement with my customer to pay a certain amount each week and so

even a large purchase is not felt, as I make the instalments small enough to suit my client."

"You are employed during the day, I take it?"

"Yes, I am a clerk in the City."

Again we were in the blissful realms of fiction!

"Suppose I take this book at ten pounds, what instalment should I have to pay each week?"

"Oh, what you like, sir. Would five shillings be too much?"

"I think not."

"Very well, sir, if you pay me five shillings now, I will leave the book with you, and shall have pleasure in calling this day week for the next instalment."

I put my hand into my pocket, and drew out two half-crowns, which I passed over to him.

"Do I need to sign any form or undertaking to pay the rest?"

The young man laughed cordially.

"Oh, no, sir, there is no formality necessary. You see, sir, this is largely a labour of love with me, although I don't deny I have my eye on the future. I am getting together what I hope will be a very valuable connection with gentlemen like yourself who are fond of books, and I trust some day that I may be able to resign my place with the insurance company and set up a choice little business of my own, where my knowledge of values in literature will prove useful."

And then, after making a note in a little book he took from his pocket, he bade me a most graceful good-bye and departed, leaving me cogitating over what it all meant.

Next morning two articles were handed to me. The first came by post and was a pamphlet on *Christian Science and Absent Mindedness*, exactly similar to the one I had taken away from the old curiosity shop; the second was a small key made from my wax impression that would fit the front door of the same shop—a key fashioned by an excellent anarchist friend of mine in an obscure street near Holborn.

That night at ten o'clock I was inside the old curiosity shop, with a small storage battery in my pocket, and a little electric glow lamp at my buttonhole, a most useful instrument for either burglar or detective.

I had expected to find the books of the establishment in a safe, which, if it was similar to the one in Park Lane, I was prepared to open with the false keys in my possession or to take an impression of the keyhole and trust to my anarchist friend for the rest. But to my amazement I discovered all the papers pertaining to the concern in a desk which was not even locked. The books, three in number, were the ordinary day book, journal, and ledger referring to the shop; book-keeping of the older fashion; but in a portfolio lay half a dozen foolscap sheets, headed "Mr. Rogers's List," "Mr. Macpherson's," "Mr. Tyrrel's," the names I had already learned, and three others. These lists contained in the first column, names; in the second column, addresses; in the third, sums of money; and then in the small, square places following were amounts ranging from two-and-sixpence to a pound. At the bottom of Mr. Macpherson's list was the name of

Alport Webster, Imperial Flats, £10; then in the small, square place, five shillings. These six sheets, each headed by a canvasser's name, were evidently the record of current collections, and the innocence of the whole thing was so apparent that if it were not for my fixed rule never to believe that I am at the bottom of any case until I have come on something suspicious, I would have gone out empty-handed as I came in.

The six sheets were loose in a thin portfolio, but standing on a shelf above the desk were a number of fat volumes, one of which I took down, and saw that it contained similar lists running back several years. I noticed on Mr. Macpherson's current list the name of Lord Semptam, an eccentric old nobleman whom I knew slightly. Then turning to the list immediately before the current one the name was still there; I traced it back through list after list until I found the first entry, which was no less than three years previous, and there Lord Semptam was down for a piece of furniture costing fifty pounds, and on that account he had paid a pound a week for more than three years, totalling a hundred and seventy pounds at the least, and instantly the glorious simplicity of the scheme dawned upon me, and I became so interested in the swindle that I lit the gas, fearing my little lamp would be exhausted before my investigation ended, for it promised to be a long one.

In several instances the intended victim proved shrewder than old Simpson had counted upon, and the word "Settled" had been written on the line carrying the name when the exact number of instalments was paid. But as these shrewd persons dropped out, others took their places, and Simpson's dependence on their absent-mindedness seemed to be justified in nine cases out of ten. His collectors were collecting long after the debt had been paid. In Lord Semptam's case, the payment had evidently become chronic, and the old man was giving away his pound a week to the suave Macpherson two years after his debt had been liquidated.

From the big volume I detached the loose leaf, dated 1893, which recorded Lord Semptam's purchase of a carved table for fifty pounds, and on which he had been paying a pound a week from that time to the date of which I am writing, which was November 1896. This single document taken from the file of three years previous, was not likely to be missed, as would have been the case if I had selected a current sheet. I nevertheless made a copy of the names and addresses of Macpherson's present clients; then, carefully placing everything exactly as I had found it, I extinguished the gas, and went out of the shop, locking the door behind me. With the 1893 sheet in my pocket I resolved to prepare a pleasant little surprise for my suave friend Macpherson when he called to get his next instalment of five shillings.

Late as was the hour when I reached Trafalgar Square I could not deprive myself of the felicity of calling on Mr. Spenser Hale, who I knew was then on duty. He never appeared at his best during office hours, because officialism stiffened his stalwart frame. Mentally he was impressed with the importance of his position, and added to this he was not then allowed to smoke his big, black pipe and terrible tobacco. He received me with the curtness I had been taught to

expect when I inflicted myself upon him at his office. He greeted me abruptly with:

"I say, Valmont, how long do you expect to be on this job?"

"What job?" I asked mildly.

"Oh, you know what I mean: the Summertrees affair."

"Oh, *that!*" I exclaimed, with surprise. "The Summertrees case is already completed, of course. If I had known you were in a hurry, I should have finished up everything yesterday, but as you and Podgers, and I don't know how many more, have been at it sixteen or seventeen days, if not longer, I thought I might venture to take as many hours, as I am working entirely alone. You said nothing about haste, you know."

"Oh, come now, Valmont, that's a bit thick. Do you mean to say you have already got evidence against the man?"

"Evidence absolute and complete."

"Then who are the coiners?"

"My most estimable friend, how often have I told you not to jump at conclusions? I informed you when you first spoke to me about the matter that Summertrees was neither a coiner nor a confederate of coiners. I secured evidence sufficient to convict him of quite another offence, which is probably unique in the annals of crime. I have penetrated the mystery of the shop, and discovered the reason for all those suspicious actions which quite properly set you on his trail. Now I wish you to come to my flat next Wednesday night at a quarter to six, prepared to make an arrest."

"I must know who I am to arrest, and on what counts."

"Quite so, *mon ami* Hale; I did not say you were to make an arrest, but merely warned you to be prepared. If you have time now to listen to the disclosures, I am quite at your service. I promise you there are some original features in the case. If, however, the present moment is inopportune, drop in on me at your convenience, previously telephoning so that you may know whether I am there or not, and thus your valuable time will not be expended purposelessly."

With this I presented to him my most courteous bow, and although his mystified expression hinted a suspicion that he thought I was chaffing him, as he would call it, official dignity dissolved somewhat, and he intimated his desire to hear all about it then and there. I had succeeded in arousing my friend Hale's curiosity. He listened to the evidence with perplexed brow, and at last ejaculated he would be blessed.

"This young man," I said in conclusion, "will call upon me at six on Wednesday afternoon, to receive his second five shillings. I propose that you, in your uniform, shall be seated there with me to receive him, and I am anxious to study Mr. Macpherson's countenance when he realises he has walked in to confront a policeman. If you will then allow me to cross-examine him for a few moments, not after the manner of Scotland Yard, with a warning lest he incriminate himself, but in the free and easy fashion we adopt in Paris, I shall afterwards turn the case over to you to be dealt with at your discretion."

"You have a wonderful flow of language, Monsieur Valmont," was the officer's tribute to me. "I shall be on hand at a quarter to six on Wednesday."

"Meanwhile," said I, "kindly say nothing of this to any one. We must arrange a complete surprise for Macpherson. That is essential. Please make no move in the matter at all until Wednesday night."

Spenser Hale, much impressed, nodded acquiescence, and I took a polite leave of him.

The question of lighting is an important one in a room such as mine, and electricity offers a good deal of scope to the ingenious. Of this fact I have taken full advantage. I can manipulate the lighting of my room so that any particular spot is bathed in brilliancy, while the rest of the space remains in comparative gloom, and I arranged the lamps so that the full force of their rays impinged against the door that Wednesday evening, while I sat on one side of the table in semi-darkness and Hale sat on the other, with a light beating down on him from above which gave him the odd, sculptured look of a living statue of Justice, stern and triumphant. Any one entering the room would be first dazzled by the light, and next would see the gigantic form of Hale in the full uniform of his order.

When Angus Macpherson was shown into this room he was quite visibly taken aback, and paused abruptly on the threshold, his gaze riveted on the huge policeman. I think his first purpose was to turn and run, but the door closed behind him, and he doubtless heard, as we all did, the sound of the bolt being thrust in its place, thus locking him in.

"I—I beg your pardon," he stammered, "I expected to meet Mr. Webster."

As he said this, I pressed the button under my table, and was instantly enshrouded with light. A sickly smile overspread the countenance of Macpherson as he caught sight of me, and he made a very creditable attempt to carry off the situation with nonchalance.

"Oh, there you are, Mr. Webster; I did not notice you at first."

It was a tense moment. I spoke slowly and impressively.

"Sir, perhaps you are not unacquainted with the name of Eugène Valmont."

He replied brazenly:

"I am sorry to say, sir, I never heard of the gentleman before."

At this came a most inopportune "Haw-haw" from that blockhead Spenser Hale, completely spoiling the dramatic situation I had elaborated with such thought and care. It is little wonder the English possess no drama, for they show scant appreciation of the sensational moments in life.

"Haw-haw," brayed Spenser Hale, and at once reduced the emotional atmosphere to a fog of commonplace. However, what is a man to do? He must handle the tools with which it pleases Providence to provide him. I ignored Hale's untimely laughter.

"Sit down, sir," I said to Macpherson, and he obeyed.

"You have called on Lord Semptam this week," I continued sternly.

"Yes, sir."

"And collected a pound from him?"

"Yes, sir."

"In October, 1893, you sold Lord Semptam a carved antique table for fifty pounds?"

"Quite right, sir."

"When you were here last week you gave me Ralph Summertrees as the name of a gentleman living in Park Lane. You knew at the time that this man was your employer?"

Macpherson was now looking fixedly at me, and on this occasion made no reply. I went on calmly:

"You also knew that Summertrees, of Park Lane, was identical with Simpson, of Tottenham Court Road?"

"Well, sir," said Macpherson, "I don't exactly see what you're driving at, but it's quite usual for a man to carry on a business under an assumed name. There is nothing illegal about that."

"We will come to the illegality in a moment, Mr. Macpherson. You, and Rogers, and Tyrrel, and three others, are confederates of this man Simpson."

"We are in his employ; yes, sir, but no more confederates than clerks usually are."

"I think, Mr. Macpherson, I have said enough to show you that the game is, what you call, up. You are now in the presence of Mr. Spenser Hale, from Scotland Yard, who is waiting to hear your confession."

Here the stupid Hale broke in with his:

"And remember, sir, that anything you say will be——"

"Excuse me, Mr. Hale," I interrupted hastily, "I shall turn over the case to you in a very few moments, but I ask you to remember our compact, and to leave it for the present entirely in my hands. Now, Mr. Macpherson, I want your confession, and I want it at once."

"Confession? Confederates?" protested Macpherson with admirably simulated surprise. "I must say you use extraordinary terms, Mr.—Mr.— What did you say the name was?"

"Haw, haw," roared Hale. "His name is Monsieur Valmont."

"I implore you, Mr. Hale, to leave this man to me for a very few moments. Now, Macpherson, what have you to say in your defence?"

"Where nothing criminal has been alleged, Monsieur Valmont, I see no necessity for defence. If you wish me to admit that somehow you have acquired a number of details regarding our business, I am perfectly willing to do so, and to subscribe to their accuracy. If you will be good enough to let me know of what you complain, I shall endeavour to make the point clear to you if I can. There has evidently been some misapprehension, but for the life of me, without further explanation, I am as much in a fog as I was on my way coming here, for it is getting a little thick outside."

Macpherson certainly was conducting himself with great discretion, and presented, quite unconsciously, a much more diplomatic figure than my friend, Spenser Hale, sitting stiffly opposite me. His tone was one of mild expostulation, mitigated by the intimation that all misunderstanding speedily would be cleared away. To outward view he offered a perfect picture of innocence, neither pro-

testing too much nor too little. I had, however, another surprise in store for him, a trump card, as it were, and I played it down on the table.

"There!" I cried with vim, "have you ever seen that sheet before?"

He glanced at it without offering to take it in his hand.

"Oh, yes," he said, "that has been abstracted from our file. It is what I call my visiting list."

"Come, come, sir," I cried sternly, "you refuse to confess, but I warn you we know all about it. You never heard of Dr. Willoughby, I suppose?"

"Yes, he is the author of the silly pamphlet on Christian Science."

"You are in the right, Mr. Macpherson; on Christian Science and Absent-Mindedness."

"Possibly. I haven't read it for a long while."

"Have you ever met this learned doctor, Mr. Macpherson?"

"Oh, yes. Dr. Willoughby is the pen-name of Mr. Summertrees. He believes in Christian Science and that sort of thing, and writes about it."

"Ah, really. We are getting your confession bit by bit, Mr. Macpherson. I think it would be better to be quite frank with us."

"I was just going to make the same suggestion to you, Monsieur Valmont. If you will tell me in a few words exactly what is your charge against either Mr. Summertrees or myself, I will know then what to say."

"We charge you, sir, with obtaining money under false pretences, which is a crime that has landed more than one distinguished financier in prison."

Spenser Hale shook his fat forefinger at me, and said:

"Tut, tut, Valmont; we mustn't threaten, we mustn't threaten, you know"; but I went on without heeding him.

"Take, for instance, Lord Semptam You sold him a table for fifty pounds, on the instalment plan. He was to pay a pound a week, and in less than a year the debt was liquidated. But he is an absent-minded man, as all your clients are. That is why you came to me. I had answered the bogus Willoughby's advertisement. And so you kept on collecting and collecting for something more than three years. Now do you understand the charge?"

Mr. Macpherson's head during this accusation was held slightly inclined to one side. At first his face was clouded by the most clever imitation of anxious concentration of mind I had ever seen, and this was gradually cleared away by the dawn of awakening perception. When I had finished, an ingratiating smile hovered about his lips.

"Really, you know," he said, "that is rather a capital scheme. The absent-minded league, as one might call them. Most ingenious. Summertrees, if he had any sense of humour, which he hasn't, would be rather taken by the idea that his innocent fad for Christian Science had led him to be suspected of obtaining money under false pretences. But, really, there are no pretensions about the matter at all. As I understand it, I simply call and receive the money through the forgetfulness of the persons on my list, but where I think you would have both Summertrees and myself, if there was anything in your audacious theory, would be an indictment for conspiracy. Still, I quite see how the mistake arises.

You have jumped to the conclusion that we sold nothing to Lord Semptam except that carved table three years ago. I have pleasure in pointing out to you that his lordship is a frequent customer of ours, and has had many things from us at one time or another. Sometimes he is in our debt; sometimes we are in his. We keep a sort of running contract with him by which he pays us a pound a week. He and several other customers deal on the same plan, and in return for an income that we can count upon, they get the first offer of anything in which they are supposed to be interested. As I have told you, we call these sheets in the office our visiting lists, but to make the visiting lists complete you need what we term our encyclopædia. We call it that because it is in so many volumes; a volume for each year, running back I don't know how long. You will notice little figures here from time to time above the amount stated on this visiting list. These figures refer to the pages of the encyclopædia for the current year, and on that page is noted the new sale, and the amount of it, as it might be set down, say, in a ledger."

"That is a very entertaining explanation, Mr. Macpherson. I suppose this encyclopædia, as you call it, is in the shop at Tottenham Court Road."

"Oh, no, sir. Each volume of the encyclopædia is self-locking. These books contain the real secret of our business, and they are kept in the safe at Mr. Summertrees's house in Park Lane. Take Lord Semptam's account, for instance. You will find in faint figures under a certain date, 102. If you turn to page 102 of the encyclopædia for that year, you will then see a list of what Lord Semptam has bought, and the prices he was charged for them. It is really a very simple matter. If you will allow me to use your telephone for a moment, I will ask Mr. Summertrees, who has not yet begun dinner, to bring with him here the volume for 1893, and, within a quarter of an hour, you will be perfectly satisfied that everything is quite legitimate."

I confess that the young man's naturalness and confidence staggered me, the more so as I saw by the sarcastic smile on Hale's lips that he did not believe a single word spoken. A portable telephone stood on the table, and as Macpherson finished his explanation, he reached over and drew it towards him. Then Spenser Hale interfered.

"Excuse *me*," he said, "I'll do the telephoning. What is the call number of Mr. Summertrees?"

"140 Hyde Park."

Hale at once called up Central, and presently was answered from Park Lane. We heard him say:

"Is this the residence of Mr. Summertrees? Oh, is that you, Podgers? Is Mr. Summertrees in? Very well. This is Hale. I am in Valmont's flat—Imperial Flats —you know. Yes, where you went with me the other day. Very well, go to Mr. Summertrees, and say to him that Mr. Macpherson wants the encyclopædia for 1893. Do you get that? Yes, encyclopædia. Oh, he'll understand what it is. Mr. Macpherson. No, don't mention my name at all. Just say Mr. Macpherson wants the encyclopædia for the year 1893, and that you are to bring it. Yes, you may tell him that Mr. Macpherson is at Imperial Flats, but don't

mention my name at all. Exactly. As soon as he gives you the book, get into a cab, and come here as quickly as possible with it. If Summertrees doesn't want to let the book go, then tell him to come with you. If he won't do that, place him under arrest, and bring both him and the book here. All right. Be as quick as you can; we're waiting."

Macpherson made no protest against Hale's use of the telephone; he merely sat back in his chair with a resigned expression on his face which, if painted on canvas, might have been entitled "The Falsely Accused." When Hale rang off, Macpherson said:

"Of course you know your own business best, but if your man arrests Summertrees, he will make you the laughing-stock of London. There is such a thing as unjustifiable arrest, as well as getting money under false pretences, and Mr. Summertrees is not the man to forgive an insult. And then, if you will allow me to say so, the more I think over your absent-minded theory, the more absolutely grotesque it seems, and if the case ever gets into the newspapers, I am sure, Mr. Hale, you'll experience an uncomfortable half-hour with your chiefs at Scotland Yard."

"I'll take the risk of that, thank you," said Hale stubbornly.

"Am I to consider myself under arrest?" enquired the young man.

"No, sir."

"Then, if you will pardon me, I shall withdraw. Mr. Summertrees will show you everything you wish to see in his books, and can explain his business much more capably than I, because he knows more about it; therefore, gentlemen, I bid you good-night."

"No, you don't. Not just yet awhile," exclaimed Hale, rising to his feet simultaneously with the young man.

"Then I *am* under arrest," protested Macpherson.

"You're not going to leave this room until Podgers brings that book."

"Oh, very well," and he sat down again.

And now, as talking is dry work, I set out something to drink, a box of cigars, and a box of cigarettes. Hale mixed his favourite brew, but Macpherson, shunning the wine of his country, contented himself with a glass of plain mineral water, and lit a cigarette. Then he awoke my high regard by saying pleasantly as if nothing had happened:

"While we are waiting, Monsieur Valmont, may I remind you that you owe me five shillings?"

I laughed, took the coin from my pocket, and paid him, whereupon he thanked me.

"Are you connected with Scotland Yard, Monsieur Valmont?" asked Macpherson, with the air of a man trying to make conversation to bridge over a tedious interval; but before I could reply, Hale blurted out:

"Not likely!"

"You have no official standing as a detective, then, Monsieur Valmont?"

"None whatever," I replied quickly, thus getting in my oar ahead of Hale.

"That is a loss to our country," pursued this admirable young man, with evident sincerity.

I began to see I could make a good deal of so clever a fellow if he came under my tuition.

"The blunders of our police," he went on, "are something deplorable. If they would but take lessons in strategy, say, from France, their unpleasant duties would be so much more acceptably performed, with much less discomfort to their victims."

"France," snorted Hale in derision, "why, they call a man guilty there until he's proven innocent."

"Yes, Mr. Hale, and the same seems to be the case in Imperial Flats. You have quite made up your mind that Mr. Summertrees is guilty, and will not be content until he proves his innocence. I venture to predict that you will hear from him before long in a manner that may astonish you."

Hale grunted and looked at his watch. The minutes passed very slowly as we sat there smoking, and at last even I began to get uneasy. Macpherson, seeing our anxiety, said that when he came in the fog was almost as thick as it had been the week before, and that there might be some difficulty in getting a cab. Just as he was speaking the door was unlocked from the outside, and Podgers entered, bearing a thick volume in his hand. This he gave to his superior, who turned over its pages in amazement, and then looked at the back, crying:

"*Encyclopædia of Sport*, 1893! What sort of a joke is this, Mr. Macpherson?"

There was a pained look on Mr. Macpherson's face as he reached forward and took the book. He said with a sigh:

"If you had allowed me to telephone, Mr. Hale, I should have made it perfectly plain to Summertrees what was wanted. I might have known this mistake was liable to occur. There is an increasing demand for out-of-date books of sport, and no doubt Mr. Summertrees thought this was what I meant. There is nothing for it but to send your man back to Park Lane and tell Mr. Summertrees that what we want is the locked volume of accounts for 1893, which we call the encyclopædia. Allow me to write an order that will bring it. Oh, I'll show you what I have written before your man takes it," he said, as Hale stood ready to look over his shoulder.

On my notepaper he dashed off a request such as he had outlined, and handed it to Hale, who read it and gave it to Podgers.

"Take that to Summertrees, and get back as quickly as possible. Have you a cab at the door?"

"Yes, sir."

"Is it foggy outside?"

"Not so much, sir, as it was an hour ago. No difficulty about the traffic now, sir."

"Very well, get back as soon as you can."

Podgers saluted, and left with the book under his arm. Again the door was locked, and again we sat smoking in silence until the stillness was broken by the tinkle of the telephone. Hale put the receiver to his ear.

"Yes, this is the Imperial Flats. Yes. Valmont. Oh, yes; Macpherson is here. What? Out of what? Can't hear you. Out of print. What, the encyclopædia's out of print? Who is that speaking? Dr. Willoughby; thanks."

Macpherson rose as if he would go to the telephone, but instead (and he acted so quietly that I did not notice what he was doing until the thing was done), he picked up the sheet which he called his visiting list, and walking quite without haste, held it in the glowing coals of the fire-place until it disappeared in a flash of flame up the chimney. I sprang to my feet indignant, but too late to make even a motion towards saving the sheet. Macpherson regarded us both with that self-deprecatory smile which had several times lighted up his face.

"How dared you burn that sheet?" I demanded.

"Because, Monsieur Valmont, it did not belong to you; because you do not belong to Scotland Yard; because you stole it; because you had no right to it; and because you have no official standing in this country. If it had been in Mr. Hale's possession I should not have dared, as you put it, to destroy the sheet, but as this sheet was abstracted from my master's premises by you, an entirely unauthorized person, whom he would have been justified in shooting dead if he had found you housebreaking and you had resisted him on his discovery, I took the liberty of destroying the document. I have always held that these sheets should not have been kept, for, as has been the case, if they fell under the scrutiny of so intelligent a person as Eugène Valmont, improper inferences might have been drawn. Mr. Summertrees, however, persisted in keeping them, but made this concession, that if I ever telegraphed him or telephoned him the word 'Encyclopædia,' he would at once burn these records, and he, on his part, was to telegraph or telephone to me 'The *Encyclopædia* is out of print,' whereupon I would know that he had succeeded.

"Now, gentlemen, open this door, which will save me the trouble of forcing it. Either put me formally under arrest, or cease to restrict my liberty. I am very much obliged to Mr. Hale for telephoning, and I have made no protest to so gallant a host as Monsieur Valmont is, because of the locked door. However, the farce is now terminated. The proceedings I have sat through were entirely illegal, and if you will pardon me, Mr. Hale, they have been a little too French to go down here in old England, or to make a report in the newspapers that would be quite satisfactory to your chiefs. I demand either my formal arrest, or the unlocking of that door."

In silence I pressed a button, and my man threw open the door. Macpherson walked to the threshold, paused, and looked back at Spenser Hale, who sat there silent as a sphinx.

"Good-evening, Mr. Hale."

There being no reply, he turned to me with the same ingratiating smile:

"Good-evening, Monsieur Eugène Valmont," he said, "I shall give myself the pleasure of calling next Wednesday at six for my five shillings."

L. T. Meade and Robert Eustace

THE FACE IN THE DARK

from The London Magazine, 1903

Permission to reprint is granted by Mr. Eustace

I am an unmarried man with sufficient means to support myself in a quiet way. I enjoy a bachelor's life, am fond of dabbling in literature, write occasionally for the Press, possess a fair knowledge of science, and produce the best photographs of any amateur that I know. I have no present intention of marrying, but I am by no means unsociable. I like the company of my fellow-men, and go a good deal into Society. My name is Laurence Hyne, and I am thirty-two years of age.

In these days of intense living no man who is not a confirmed hermit can shut himself away from strong situations, from moments of danger, or from hours when the world seems more or less to totter beneath him. I, like others, have had my due share of adventures of one sort and another, and the one I am about to tell was by no means the least curious of those that occurred to me.

On the 18th of a very hot June, I went to the reception of some friends of mine, the Sitwells, who lived in Berkeley Square. This was always a brilliant function, and I knew that I should meet many of my friends there. On this occasion there was one in particular, a young fellow of the name of Granby Manners, whom I particularly wished to shake once more by the hand. I had known him as a boy, and as his mother had been my dearest and most valued friend, I took an interest in him. He was an open-handed, unselfish, clever lad, but was also one of the most nervous boys I had ever come across. His ideas were lofty and aspiring, but his nerves hampered him, and to such an extent that, when still quite a lad, not more than seventeen, he was ordered abroad, where he had resided under the care of a tutor ever since. Mrs. Manners had been a sort of elder sister to me—she had done me many good turns in life—had assisted me more than once, not only by her advice, but practically, and on her death-bed had charged me most emphatically to look after Granby, and if at any time I could do him a kindness, not to hesitate, for her sake, to do it.

"He is ten years your junior, don't forget that, Laurence," she said. "He knows little or nothing of English life. When the estate comes to him he will be surrounded by adventurers—help him if you can."

I promised faithfully, and now the time had come, for Granby's mother and father were both dead—the boy inherited the old Croftwood estates, and had come home to attend to business matters.

On the day of the Sitwells's function I received a letter from Lady Willoughby, Granby's aunt. She wrote from Scotland.

"My nephew is in London," she wrote. "Pray find him out and write to me with regard to his appearance, his prospects, his present ideas of life. He was always a strange boy, and not at all a person to own a big estate like Croftwood Hall. I am unable to travel, as you know, but my dear sister told me on her death-bed that you had promised to be good to him. Pray do what you can and let me know."

Accordingly I went to the Sitwells primed in every way to see after young Manners. Mrs. Manners had had an unhappy life—her burden was a heavy one, so heavy that it had sent her to her grave before her time. The facts were these. Her husband was one of the worst of men—a drunkard, reckless, fast, extravagant. There were rumours of even darker vices—of deeds committed that ought never to have seen the light of day. Some people said that the man was half insane. Well, he was dead, and the boy was not in the least like him.

I arrived at the Sitwells in good time. The house was already full of guests and very soon I ran up against young Manners. He had a bright face, a refined, elegant appearance, and an affectionate manner.

"I am glad to see you," he said to me. "This is quite like old times. Where can we go to have a long chat?"

"You must come to my rooms for that, Granby. But here—this terrace is empty for a few moments. Come and stand under this awning and let me look at you."

We went out through an open window and stood on a beautiful terrace screened by an awning and decked with flowers.

"You do look quite a man, Granby," I said. "Why, you must be two-and-twenty. Your hands must be pretty full of business now, my boy, with that big estate, and you the sole person to look after it."

"The fact is, Hyne," he answered, "I am so harried and rushed about that I have hardly a minute to call my own. I want to come to see you, and will at any hour you like to appoint."

"Here are two chairs," I said suddenly, for as he spoke I noticed the old nervous catch in his voice, and the quick movement of the head that spoke of a highly-strung system. "Sit down, won't you, Granby. You have a big story to tell me. Let's begin to hear it at once."

"Well," he answered, "there's a great deal to say. My father has left things involved, but, of course, they *may* come all right; I can't say. Sometimes I fear—sometimes I hope. Anyhow, I shall know soon. What day is this—the 18th. I shall know, I must know, before the 24th."

"What do you mean by that?" I asked in astonishment.

"I will tell you presently. I could not in this crowd."

He glanced nervously behind him.

"Come and dine with me to-morrow night," was my answer.

His face lit up with pleasure. He was about to reply in the affirmative when some people came on to the terrace. They were two girls, both handsome and total strangers to me. I saw, however, that Granby knew them. His face flushed

with vivid colour, and his eyes grew dark with delight. He greeted both girls, and especially the slighter and smaller of the two, with effusion.

"This is good," he said; "I was just talking to a special friend of mine. May I introduce you?"

A moment later I was shaking the hand and looking into the face of the brightest and most capable girl probably in the whole of England. Her name was Angela Dickinson. She was the daughter of a well-known barrister, who would undoubtedly be appointed to a judgeship before long. She had only lately come out—had met Manners when abroad; they were great chums. Oh, yes, it was good to see him again. They smiled at each other, and young Manners and Miss Angela Dickinson went off together; the other girl, whose name was Muriel, fell to my share to entertain.

"I am so glad we have met Mr. Manners and that he looks so well," she said. "When we saw him at Naples he often appeared very much troubled. I am glad he has met an old friend in you."

"Yes," I replied. "I have known Granby since he was a little boy. His mother was one of my best friends. Granby had a sad childhood; his father—I suppose everyone knows about him."

She nodded and looked grave.

"The man is dead," I continued. "Let his ashes rest in peace. It seems to me, Miss Dickinson, that Manners's only fault is that he is extremely sensitive."

"I know that," she replied. "Angela and he are great friends."

I followed the direction of her eyes. The pair were standing closely together at the further end of the balcony.

"There is not a doubt that they care for each other," said Miss Muriel; "but up to the present no word has been spoken—at least to my father. I wish he would speak—his silence puts Angela in a strained position."

Soon afterwards I took my leave, going home to attend to some special business which was occupying me that night. Just as I was going downstairs young Manners bounded after me.

"May I come to-night instead of to-morrow night?" he said. "It doesn't matter about dinner. I want to talk things over with you."

I told him to come in about nine o'clock, and he nodded his acceptance.

Punctually to the hour he arrived, looking handsome and gentlemanly in his evening clothes. I offered him a pipe; he sat down and we both smoked in silence for a minute or two.

"Well," I said, suddenly—for I saw that it must be my business to lead the way—"I felt rather anxious about you when we sat together in the balcony; but Miss Dickinson has relieved all my fears. You are all right, Manners—I congratulate you most heartily on your future."

He wrung my hand but did not speak.

"I suppose the engagement will soon be announced?" I said, after a pause.

"Oh, we are not engaged, at least, not exactly. I'd give the world if it could be, but I don't see my way—there are difficulties, and monstrous ones. It is about those I want to talk to you."

"Well, speak up, old chap. I am interested in you from every point of view. Tell me everything and we will take counsel together."

He drew his chair close to mine.

"When were you last at Croftwood?" was his remark.

"Not for some years now—not since your mother's death. I grant that the old place is gloomy, but nevertheless I love it. In your hands it will assume a very different appearance. You can rebuild and redecorate. You can cut down sufficient timber to give the place more air, and not such a crowded-up appearance. Croftwood Hall will be, I am sure, a lovely place in your reign, Manners, and Miss Angela is the very girl to make you happy there."

"I love the place," he answered—"it has been in our family for hundreds of years. Nevertheless I dread it very much. I had a terrible fright there and have never been the same since. Did you hear of it?"

"No," I answered, puzzled at his tone.

"It happened a long time ago now, and it was on account of that I was sent abroad. My mother and father were away at the time—my mother was ordered to the sea for her health. You know, of course, that the old place is supposed to be haunted?"

"Most old places are," I answered in some heat. "But really, Manners, at this time of day to talk of haunted houses means nonsense. No old family seat is complete without its ghost. But what of that—no one really believes in the unearthly visitant."

"Some people do," he said with a shudder. "Well, let me tell you. My father and mother were both away—my mother wanted me to go to her, but my father refused. You know what a brute he was."

"Hush," I said, "he is dead."

"Dead or alive, I must speak the truth—he was a brute. I dreaded and hated him, but I worshipped my mother. I was terribly put out at being left behind. I was a big lad—fifteen at the time, but I cried myself ill. The house was horribly lonely, and there were only two servants—old Tarring, the butler, who is still there, and the cook. Half the rooms were shut up. The days were terrible and the long evenings were enough to turn one's brain. I had not even a book to read, for my father had locked up the library. I had not a friend to speak to, there was not a young person anywhere within miles. My nervousness, always a big thing, got worse. I lost my sleep—I used to wander about the old house half the night. On one special night I was so bad that I could not eat any dinner, and afterwards I had a fit of shivering and fancied I saw things whenever I looked up. I rang for Tarring at last and begged of him, for God's sake, to keep me company. You know him, of course, a bent old party with a nose like a beak. He came up and looked into my face and said solemnly:

"'Master Granby, if this goes on you will be mad soon.'

"'What do you mean?' I asked, looking at him with terror.

"'You have madness in your eyes, sir, and you inherit it—don't you forget that. There's that gentleman, your great-great-uncle, whose portrait is in the picture gallery. He died in Bedlam. You'd best go and look at his picture and

be warned. A young gentleman like you ought to be happy. He should come to his meals with appetite and sleep sound o' nights. Take my advice, sir, think no more about nerves or fancies, or they will be your undoing.'

"He went away, having positively refused to stay with me another moment, declaring that my face gave him the blues and that he preferred cook's company in the kitchen. I thought I would go to bed and drown my terrors in sleep. I covered myself well up with the bedclothes, but I could not rest. You remember the picture gallery at Croftwood, don't you, Hyne?"

"Perfectly well," I replied.

"It is on the ground floor, and occupies almost the whole west wing of the house. It communicates with the chapel at one end and with the dining-hall on the other. I lay with my eyes wide open, my heart beating like a hammer, and my thoughts full of my mad great-uncle. Suddenly I remembered that his name was also Granby Manners. I took an unhealthy desire to look at his face. It could not be combated. I got up, and candle in hand went down through the old house. At last I found myself in the picture gallery. You know those deep embrasures near the mullioned windows?"

I nodded.

"The picture was at the end close to the old chapel. Just as I got up to it, I saw someone standing behind me—someone in black—with a hood on. The whole thing was over in a minute, for I fainted away. But I remember now as distinctly as though it were only just happening, that the figure spoke and with outstretched hands pointed at me and said:

" '*Granby Manners, you will die in this room!*'

"My screams must have brought old Tarring. I was taken to my bedroom, the doctor was summoned, and I was in bed in danger of brain fever for many weeks. My mother got better and returned home. When I saw her I told her exactly what had happened. She was full of sympathy and tenderness and love. She took immediate steps and I was sent abroad with a tutor. We went from one sunny land to another, and I began to forget my troubles and grew strong and healthy once again. Then came the terrible news of my mother's death—I should never see my darling more. I was stricken to the earth—I resolved never to return to England. But two years after my father died, and the lawyers wrote and said that I must return home at once. I found the estate terribly involved, in short, the outlook is most gloomy."

"Have you told this strange story to Miss Dickinson?" I asked.

"I have. She knows everything. She knows that we cannot be engaged until things clear up a bit. If they never do, which is more than probable, I must give her up. Yes, I must, however hard it may be. As to the story of my mad ancestor, I do not think much about it. There has not been a second case of insanity in the family—so that goes for nothing; but I cannot ask Mr. Dickinson for Angela when I have no money to support her with."

"Surely that sounds ridiculous," I said. "You, as owner of Croftwood Hall, must have plenty of money."

"That is the point, Hyne," he replied. "The complications are enormous. I

will come to that presently; but as we are talking of nerves and fancies, may I tell you something else? You have heard, of course, of the Croftwood Elm?"

I nodded. He was alluding to an enormous elm, of great age, which grew by itself just within sight of the house. There was a superstition in the old place that a branch from this elm always fell before the owner's death.

"I was at Croftwood last week," continued Granby. "The gardeners were clearing away the great branch which had fallen from the elm two days before my father's death."

"Well," I said, "you are not going to think anything of that. It was merely a coincidence. Gales of wind will break off the branches of old trees to the end of time. Come, Manners, I am ashamed that you should pin your faith to such rubbish. But tell me, when are you going to Croftwood again?"

"To-morrow."

"What! To-morrow! May I come with you?"

"Would you come?"

His face lighted up with intense pleasure.

"That would be splendid," he said. "I can't tell you how I hate these visits. A great deal hangs on what takes place in the next few days. Poltimore will be there. He is the horrible man to whom the estate is mortgaged."

"Croftwood Hall mortgaged?" I cried.

"Yes, and up to the hilt. I shall be awfully glad to tell you. Of course, what I say is in confidence. I don't want the whole world to know that I am a pauper."

"You cannot be that," I answered; "but anyhow, you can trust me."

"I will tell you everything to-morrow," was his answer.

He rose as he spoke, and soon afterwards took his leave.

According to my appointment, I met the lad at Waterloo the following day. We reached Croftwood soon after six o'clock. It was a lovely day, bright and not too warm, and as we drove through the park the old trees in their summer greenery restored many memories to my mind.

"Here we are," cried Granby, as the dog-cart put us down at the porch, where the old butler was waiting to receive us.

A more decrepit, bent old man I had never seen. His hooked nose, his distorted, claw-like hands, gave him the appearance more of a bird of ill-omen than anything else. As he glanced with a fixed and by no means amiable expression from Granby to myself, I observed that his eyes were keen, bright, and sharp as a needle. Whatever else had happened to old Tarring, his intellect was still well to the fore. Tarring knew me, although he pretended to regard me as a total stranger, and evidently viewed me with small favour.

"Are there no letters?" asked Manners.

"The post won't be in just yet, sir."

"Well, Tarring, Mr. Hyne has come to stay with me. See that you get a room ready for him. Now, Hyne, let us have a stroll before dinner. Doesn't the place look lovely just now? By the way, you have never met Mr. Poltimore. He was a great friend of my father's. I will tell you how my affairs stand before we see him."

We strolled off through one of the gardens.

"The situation is far worse than you have any idea of," he began. "I will endeavour to explain. No one knows exactly what my father's life was, but there is no doubt that on a certain night he got into a most terrible affair in London. Nobody knows what he did, but it was necessary for him to have twenty thousand pounds in cash that night. It was that or suicide. He obtained the sum, how I don't know, from Mr. Poltimore, who is a rich jewel merchant in the city.

"In exchange for the money my father gave the man a document, all duly attested and witnessed—a sort of mortgage on Croftwood. It is to this effect. That Mr. Poltimore holds the place as security for his money, and the mortgager has to pay 10 per cent. on the loan. There are arrears of interest now amounting to ten thousand pounds. This sum has to be paid on Midsummer day, or according to the mortgage, Mr. Poltimore seizes the property, which is worth not less than a hundred thousand pounds. But there is another and more terrible clause. It is this: even if the interest *is* paid regularly, I shall only have the place for my life, after that it passes altogether into Poltimore's hands, or into the hands of his heirs. If the arrears of interest can be paid by Midsummer day all will be well as far as I am concerned, but no child of mine can ever inherit the place. You must see for yourself that under such conditions I can't ask Angela Dickinson to be my wife."

"I am not surprised," I answered. "But have you no reasonable hope that your lawyers will raise the money?"

"They say they will do their best. But it is by no means easy."

"Suppose they fail—have you no other means of getting the money?"

"No," he answered. "I once purchased some shares in a gold mine, and I think they will, in time, bring me in a lot of money, but of course it is all a speculation, and I don't suppose anyone would lend on the chance."

"I see," I replied. "And of course it is very much to Mr. Poltimore's advantage that you should not pay the interest on Midsummer day, for he would then have a place worth one hundred thousand pounds for twenty thousand."

"Quite so," was his reply.

Our stroll had led us by this time to the old elm tree.

"Ah," cried Manners, "look for yourself. Here is the place where the branch fell before my father's death."

We struck off across the grass towards the gnarled old tree.

"I thought they had cleared it away before now, but it is still there. How odd."

We were standing exactly under the tree, and a big branch, looking very fresh and green, lay beneath it at our feet. Granby's face turned white.

"Another branch," he cried. "What does this mean?"

"Nothing, except a fresh gale," was my answer.

"You don't understand," he replied impatiently. "A branch of the old elm always falls before the death of the owner. I am the present owner. What does this allude to?"

"Come away, and don't be nonsensical," were the words which crowded to my

lips, but before I could utter them a bass voice, loud and ringing, sounded through the trees.

"Hullo!" it called.

I glanced up with relief at the interruption, and saw a tall, heavily-built man in corduroys approaching us rapidly.

"Hullo, Granby," he cried. "Just come down, eh? How seedy you look—white as a turnip. What's the matter?"

"Nothing, thanks. Let me introduce you to my friend, Mr. Laurence Hyne, Mr. Poltimore."

Poltimore raised his hat. I thought I had never seen a more disagreeable face. He eyed me with small favour and turned again to the boy.

"Is your friend coming to stay?" he asked somewhat pointedly.

"Certainly. As my guest," said Granby, in a low tone.

Poltimore uttered a mocking laugh.

"Your guest, forsooth," he said. "By the way, have you had that letter?"

"No, but it may come by this evening's post."

"You will be out of suspense at least, after you have heard," said Poltimore.

He glanced round with a frown at me, and we turned towards the house. As we entered it, Tarring approached and handed Manners a letter in a blue envelope.

"Ah, here it is," he cried.

He turned aside to open it, his fingers shaking. Poltimore watched him with intense excitement.

"Well," he said impatiently, "what is the news?"

"Good news for you, Mr. Poltimore," said Granby then. "There need be no secret," he continued, and he glanced from me to the other man. "The loan cannot be raised, therefore in four days this house is yours."

Poltimore raised his hand and brought it down again with great force on his thigh.

"It's an ill wind that blows nobody good," he said. "Upon my soul, I am sorry for you, lad, but I can't pretend that I'm not pleased on my own account at the turn events are taking. No offense to you, Mr. Hyne, but when the property comes into my hands I choose my own guests. You understand, sir. Now I'm off to the village. Don't wait dinner for me."

He went away with a great stride, banging the heavy oak door after him.

Manners turned to me. "Isn't he a brute?" he said. "But for my sake you will try to endure him, Hyne."

"My dear lad, Poltimore is nothing to me, nothing whatever, except as far as you are concerned. But show me that letter. I don't believe that the worst can have happened."

"But it has," he answered, and he handed me the letter, the contents of which had so elated Mr. Poltimore.

I read it; it ran as follows:—

"Dear Sir,—We regret to inform you that we cannot raise the money.

The shares in the mine you hold are of no value as security. The estate will therefore pass to Mr. Poltimore on Midsummer day."

"But surely," I cried, "it would be possible to find twenty thousand pounds in order to let you keep the property. To tell you the truth, Manners, I don't believe in that extraordinary document your father signed. At least, I should like to have a good look at it. The estate is entailed."

"Yes; but he broke the entail."

"How so? How is that possible? He could not do it without your permission, and you were not of age."

"He sent me a paper to sign on my twenty-first birthday. I never even guessed what it was, and signed practically without reading, but now I am certain it was that, and I signed away my birthright."

I could not help feeling a sense of dismay. Manners had no more notion of business than an infant.

I thought hard during the remainder of that evening, and at last it suddenly occurred to me to consult no less a man than Mr. Dickinson, the father of Miss Angela. I determined to tell Granby of my resolution.

"You shan't want a friend at this juncture," I said. "If I had the money I would lend it to you with a heart and a half, and think myself well off, too," I added, "for Croftwood Hall is admirable security for any loan. But I have nothing like that amount at my command, so there is no good wasting time over that thought. The place, however, is worth saving, even if you had nothing to do with it. We don't want an old family place to get into the hands of a scoundrel of Poltimore's sort. Now I propose to go to London to-morrow, for there is, as you are aware, not a moment to lose, and when there I shall consult Dickinson."

"What?" cried Granby. "Angela's father?"

"The same."

He looked uncomfortable, started up, and began to pace the room. "You—would not surely tell him—about—?"

"You must leave that to me, my boy. Whatever happens, I must have an open hand. You cannot be worse off than you are now, and it would be impossible for Dickinson to despise you for loving his daughter."

The poor fellow covered his face with his hands and groaned.

"I am off in the morning to do what I can," I said. "In the meantime, stay here and await events."

I was sorry afterwards that I had not insisted on taking him with me: but how could I foretell the horrible future.

I reached home soon after eleven o'clock, and telephoned immediately to Dickinson to know if he could see me. I had a reply in the affirmative, and went to his chambers soon after noon.

"Come out and have lunch with me," he said heartily, "and then you can tell me what it is all about. Young Manners and the Croftwood estate! But surely that is a fine property?"

"It is if we can rescue it," I replied, "and it is for that purpose I want to consult you."

We lunched in his favourite coffee house off the Strand, and I told Dickinson as much as I thought necessary of the story. He was a middle-aged man, with a staid, reserved face. It was difficult to understand how he could be the sparkling and vivacious Angela's father. He sat quietly after my communication had come to an end, then he said abruptly:

"Have you told me everything?"

I looked at him and resolved to trust him.

"There is one thing I have left out," I said. "It is this. Young Manners loves your youngest daughter as faithfully and truly as a man can love a woman. He would make her a good husband, and Croftwood is not to be despised."

"That is true," answered Dickinson. "I don't know what can be done, but I will consult my solicitor. If anyone can help you, Wantage is the man. Stay, I will give you a letter to take to him at once. You can explain matters more quickly than I could, and there isn't a moment to lose."

"The worst happens on Midsummer day, and this is the 20th. We have only four days."

He gave a low, significant whistle, then dashed off a few words to Wantage and put the letter into my hands.

Wantage was busy in his office in Lincoln's Inn. He was a little red-headed, freckled, elderly man, with a keen face, an observant eye, and manner which expressed nothing. He was very busy, as numerous clerks testified, but Dickinson's letter was *Open Sesame*, and I was allowed to see him almost immediately.

"A curious case," he said, after we had talked for over an hour. "Will you kindly leave me now, Mr. Hyne, and come back about this time to-morrow. I can give you my answer then—yes or no."

There was nothing for it but to comply. I spent the evening at my club, slept as best I could during the night that followed, and punctually to the moment was back with Wantage in the afternoon of the twenty-first. I was taken at once into his presence. He shut the door and locked it.

"I have not been idle since I saw you," he said to me. "I have been making enquiries with regard to those gold reefs. I have also heard several things by no means to Poltimore's credit. I do not believe that at the worse he can uphold his claim. It is my very firm impression that the law wants him, and sooner than he has any idea of. At any rate, one thing must be done—the cheque must be paid. I will let you have the amount. I heard, on the whole, favourable accounts with regard to those gold reefs. Croftwood is worth saving, the young man is worth rescuing. Now, if you will help me, the thing can be done."

"No fear of my not helping you," I answered cheerfully. "I would almost cut off my right hand to help that boy."

"Thanks, Mr. Hyne," he said, gazing at me critically and almost with a quizzical expression. "You are a good friend."

"His mother was a good friend to me."

"Ah, I respect you, Mr. Hyne. Well, this is your part in the matter. The cheque

must be paid to you, and you must pay it to Poltimore. The lad himself must have nothing to do with it. You must accept Poltimore's letter of release. This is a matter for a lawyer, however, and if you are going down to Croftwood to-morrow I shall have pleasure in accompanying you. Poltimore may play tricks with Manners, and possibly also with you; but I do not think he will dare to try them on with me. Will you be ready to accompany me to Croftwood Hall to-morrow?"

"Certainly," I said.

We talked a little longer; matters were finally arranged, and I left in high spirits.

On my way home it occurred to me that I would wire to Granby.

I accordingly sent the following very cheerful message:

"All right. Money will be raised. Coming down with solicitor to-morrow. Cheer up.—Laurence Hyne."

The rest of the day passed as usual. It was not until nine o'clock, just after I had returned from dining at my club, that all of a sudden it flashed upon me what a deadly and dangerous thing I had done in sending that wire to Granby. I sprang from my chair. Manners would, of course, tell Poltimore, and the man would be beside himself with rage and disappointment. Beyond doubt, Poltimore was in a most serious position; his own affairs were so critical that if he did not get relief soon, such as the Croftwood estate would furnish him with, he would go under, how deeply and how far I could not guess; but he would be submerged—ruined. As far as he was concerned, everything depended on whether young Manners was able to pay him by Midsummer day, or—great heavens! there was another alternative. Should Granby Manners *die* before Midsummer day, Poltimore would be equally safe—indeed, more safe than if the arrears of interest were paid. Then, beyond doubt, the estate would be his. He would be a rich man. Should Granby die, Poltimore would have attained the utmost height of his ambition. The position was too fearful to contemplate quietly. I, who had hoped to liberate the boy from all his troubles, had, by sending that telegram, in all possibility sealed his death warrant. A desperate and cruel man with no principle would do anything. Then there was that scoundrelly butler, a coward without a scrap of conscience. He had always hated the boy. I saw hatred in his eyes when he greeted us both at Croftwood Hall. Yes, beyond doubt, Manners was in the gravest danger.

It was impossible for me to rest. Late as it was, I found myself ten minutes afterwards in a hansom cab. I had determined to catch the ten o'clock train from Waterloo. Not an instant's delay must keep me from the place. I would wire to Wantage in the morning. He could come down and the necessary business could be transacted. But I, in the meantime, would be on the spot to prevent mischief.

I am not given to nervous fancies, but I must confess that during that railway journey to Croftwood station I had about as bad a time as a man often lives through. There was the lonely deserted house, steeped in all its superstitions; there was the supposed ghost; there was the villain who would stop at nothing;

there was his tool, the old butler; and there was the boy himself, nervous, highly strung, innocent.

The train seemed to crawl—it stopped at every station. By the time I reached Croftwood station it was nearly one o'clock. There was no fly to be had—there was nothing for it but to finish my journey on foot. I knew my way well, and struck off along the country lanes at a brisk pace. The night was fine with a high wind. Scuds of broken cloud raced across the moon, giving alternate moments of bright light followed by darkness.

At last I turned up the avenue and finally reached the house. There was no light in any of the windows. I determined not to ring the bell, but to make my way round to the left under some close-growing shrubberies. I thought it extremely probable that I could enter by the old chapel, a place no longer used either for prayer or praise. No one would think of the chapel, or be concerned as to whether the heavy oak door was locked or not. I had observed that it was unlocked when with Granby two days ago. Now it yielded to my pressure. I went straight through the chapel. This led me into the picture gallery, at the further end of which was a secret door by which I could eventually reach Granby's room.

As I walked quickly down the long picture gallery, the greater part of which was in intense darkness, the windows having been all barred and bolted, I suddenly paused and listened. Something had broken the silence. What could it be? It sounded like low guttural breathing. My heart beat fast as I advanced, then it almost stopped, for hanging unsupported, and brought into relief by a long ray of moonlight which fell through a badly-fitting shutter, was a face within a few feet of my own. Oh God!—the face was *upside down*, while breath passed quickly between the anguished lips. It was the face of Granby.

This scene lasted for only a minute; before I could speak everything was changed—a bright light flooded the apartment, and Poltimore, a candle in his hand, approached from the dining hall end. Granby was hanging by his feet. I rushed at the villain—a desperate encounter took place.

"What is this, you scoundrel?" I shouted.

He swung me off with the strength of a man nearly double my size, pushed the old butler towards me and dashed away. The latter I seized.

"Help me at once, Tarring," I cried, "or I'll wring your neck. Save Mr. Granby —what are you about, man? Be quick."

His face was ghastly, but he spoke no word. We worked quietly. A step-ladder stood behind us and a few moments later Manners lay upon the floor, still breathing, but unconscious.

"Go and fetch brandy," I cried.

The man disappeared and soon returned with a decanter and a glass. I poured a little down the boy's throat, and he opened his eyes.

A few hours later Granby was able to tell his own story.

"I got your telegram, and was nearly mad with joy," he said. "Poltimore found me holding it in my hand. He rushed at me, seized the sheet, and read the news. I shall never forget his face. It was just as though I were in Hades, and saw the

face of a lost spirit. But before I had time to realise anything he had caught me in his powerful grip. He said something to Tarring, who was not far off and they carried me away with them to the picture gallery. I think I fainted, for when I came to myself I was tied by the ankles to the beam. What I lived through during the next awful hours I can never by any possibility explain."

The doctor when he arrived made it clear that death must have ensued in a very short time. This would have been caused by the enormous congestion of the brain. The cunningness of the mode of murder was made apparent when the doctor further said that after the boy died and the body was lowered down, there would not be the slightest trace apparent to anyone of what had happened.

Both Poltimore and Tarring were arrested, and are now undergoing a term of penal servitude.

As to Granby, his friends clustered round him, and the estate was put on a firm basis. He is about to marry Angela Dickinson in a short time. The shares in the gold reef have also turned out trumps, and the owner of Croftwood Hall will once more be a very rich man.

In the bright, calm, handsome fellow, who shows not a trace of fear or nervousness, who is happy of the happy, and gay of the gay, few would recognise the boy whom I was the means of rescuing from the most terrible death.

Edgar Jepson and Robert Eustace

MR. BELTON'S IMMUNITY

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There is little doubt that, had not Miss Kitty Glentworth quarrelled so furiously with young Mr. Belton and cast him off for ever, he would not have gone on from the 99 Club to the large and beautifully-furnished flat of Mr. Cyril Montgomery—so much more Cyril than Montgomery—and lost two hundred and fourteen pounds at baccarat. It was an action for which he can hardly be blamed severely, because, when a young man knows clearly that his heart is broken for good and all, it is unlikely that his conduct will be directed by that sweet reasonableness so highly lauded by the late Matthew Arnold.

But there it was; he awoke next morning to no mean hangover and to the bitter knowledge that a month of the quarter had still to run and only eleven pounds on which to lead the life remained to him. It was not till the evening, however, that he realized that this was not to be borne. There was only one

thing to do; that was to go to his uncle and guardian, Professor Octavius Crowle, and procure an advance on his next quarter's allowance.

It was no use writing to the Professor. That worthy gentleman had fallen into a shocking, but apparently rooted, habit of never answering his nephew's letters. It was the more distressing in that those letters always treated of the same theme, an advance on his next quarter's allowance. On the two occasions on which Mr. Belton had pointed out, reproachfully, that it was a shocking bad habit, the Professor had made the disingenuous excuse that he was a busy man. This was, however, a fact; and it made it practically certain that if Mr. Belton went to see him and showed distinct symptoms of staying on, Professor Octavius Crowle would cough up the advance, as his nephew phrased it, to get rid of him.

Gloomily, therefore, by reason of his broken heart, but with a cheery little hope of a cheque for a hundred floating about on the top of the gloom, at eleven o'clock next morning Mr. Belton took his way to his uncle's solid house in Bedford Square.

The door was opened to him by Maria Ann, whom he believed to be the prettiest parlourmaid in London, and whom, had his heart not been broken, he would have made a probably successful attempt to kiss. She greeted him with an uncommonly attractive smile; then, at his request, led him straight to his uncle's study with a rather startled air. Was she, she asked herself, losing her charm?

His uncle was sitting at his desk, studying a paper. He looked a busy man and worried. Mr. Belton did not know exactly what his uncle did; he only knew that he was an eminent chemist and toxicologist and worked for the Government.

The Professor looked up, frowning, and said, inhospitably: "How are you, Richard? You always contrive to come when I'm at my busiest."

"Sorry, sir," said Richard. "It's only about a little matter of . . ."

"I know what it's about," snapped the Professor. "And one of these days you won't get it. Your father left his money to come to you through me in order that you should spend it at a reasonable rate."

"It was just an unfortunate accident . . ."

"The sixth in two years," said the Professor, coldly; but his eyes softened a little as he gazed at his well-set-up, beautifully-dressed, blue-eyed, and amiable nephew.

"I'll just put the case . . ."

"You won't. I know what it is, or what it's like; and you'll waste half my morning putting it. How much do you want?" said his uncle; and he began to hunt among the piles of papers on his desk for his cheque-book. "I don't know why we have a Public Trustee if people don't use him," he added, morosely.

"A hundred," said Mr. Belton, and a little of the gloom lifted from his spirit.

His uncle found his cheque-book and began to fill up a cheque. Mr. Belton smiled on him.

In the middle of his timely action his uncle stopped short, and said: "By the way, didn't you tell me once that you were making a study of ciphers?"

Mr. Belton blushed. He had two vices that prevented him from being the

complete young gentleman about Town: he was addicted to chess and cryptography. The polite world did not know this.

With an air of shame he said: "Yes."

"Then what do you make of this?" said his uncle; and he thrust at him the paper he had been studying.

To it was clipped a piece of parchment on which was drawn a square divided into hundreds of little squares, in each of which was a letter of the alphabet. They were in alphabetical order, alphabet after alphabet, with a Z in each corner square, so that they did not come exactly under one another.

Mr. Belton looked at it for about fifteen seconds; then he said: "Nothing. And nobody could without the key-word. It must be a *chiffre carré*."

"But if you had the key-word you *could* decipher it?"

"Rather," said Mr. Belton, confidently.

The Professor ran his long fingers through the disorderly shock of grey hair and gazed earnestly at his nephew; then he said: "Look here, Dick: would you like to earn some money?"

Mr. Belton's blue eyes opened wide in a certain consternation; he scented an effort to weaken his congenital disinclination to do work of any kind; he shuffled his feet uneasily; he said: "Oh, well, you know, I've got my little bit. It does me very well. And it doesn't seem quite fair to the fellows who like that kind of thing to go buttin' in."

"Yes, yes; a lily of the field," said Professor Crowle, unpleasantly and scowling. "But, after all, it's perhaps just as well. Though the Government will pay a big fee, it's a very dangerous job. The last man who had a shot at it came to a very painful end. But, of course, it was in the service of the country. It was only you being an expert in ciphers and a stout young fellow that put it into my head to suggest it. The Government will have no difficulty in finding someone else."

"Here; steady on, uncle," said Mr. Belton, with a sudden animation. "You say it's a dangerous job and for the good of the country and that sort of thing?"

"It is; and it's very dangerous."

Mr. Belton's ingenuous face darkened with a Byronic gloom; and he said: "Oh, well, I've got nothing to go on living for; I'll take it on."

A shadow of a grin of satisfaction wreathed the Professor's lips; then the gravity of his expression deepened; he said, gravely: "Wait a minute. Did you ever hear of the daboia?"

"No," said Mr. Belton.

"Well, the daboia, as the Hindus call it, is known to science as Russell's viper. It is a very pretty snake about six feet long; and its venom works about four times as quickly as that of the cobra. The odds are that in the course of this affair you'll get a dose of that venom injected into you. We are fairly sure that we can make you immune, but not quite sure. The anti-toxin is uncertain in its working."

"That's all right. I'll chance it," said Mr. Belton, quite cheerfully. "It looks like lively doin's."

A faint, reluctant admiration softened the hard face of the Professor; he said,

thoughtfully: "Well, you ought to be able to hold your own. After all, you were a captain in what you called a stunting regiment at nineteen and got the D.S.O. But you'll be dealing with very clever people and you'll need all your wits."

Mr. Belton nodded. He was already looking very much more intelligent.

His uncle went on: "Of course, the Home Office has excellent cipher experts, but none at the moment to handle a dangerous business like this. Either they're not the type, or they have ties which make it unwilling to call on them to take the risk. And only a cipher expert can handle it. Several people are looking for one of the right type, and I'm one of them. I was just considering how to set about it; and your coming to see me seemed almost provid—one of those curious coincidences, I mean, in which foolish and superstitious people see all kinds of absurdities. Well, the Home Office has seized some documents which should be of the greatest importance. But they're in cipher, this *chiffre carré*, and it wants the key-word. It knows of only one person in London who knows the key-word—a lady who mixes in Bohemian circles and calls herself the Princess Obrenovski."

"Not Bohemian, uncle—not Bohemian," his nephew protested quickly, in pained accents. "Popsy would never be seen in a Bohemian circle, I give you my word. Only the high life for Popsy—always."

"Popsy! What the devil are you talking about?" said his uncle.

"We always call the Princess 'Popsy.' She looks like it, you know," Mr. Belton explained. "But fancy Popsy being a Bolshi! I knew she was hot stuff; but I never guessed that. Still, you don't mean to say she'll sell the key-word?" He added in a tone of rather grieved surprise: "I always thought she was a sportswoman, Popsy."

"She'd sell it every day in the week, if someone produced the money," said his uncle in unpleasant but assured accents. "She's sold it once already. But the man she sold it to never got the chance of bringing it to us. He got the key-word, but also he got a dose of daboia venom; and that was the end of him. We know that it was daboia and not cobra—from the way his blood was clotted. And we know that he was helpless ten minutes after getting it and dead within the half-hour. Whether your friend injected it, or somebody else, we don't know. But his body was found in an empty bungalow at Thames Ditton four days after Princess Obrenovski received the money for selling the key-word to him."

Mr. Belton rubbed his hands together in a positively middle-class manner and said with genuine cheeriness: "Lively doin's! Lively doin's! But you don't mean to say that he parted with the money before he got away with the key-word?"

"He never had the money. You don't suppose he would carry a large sum of money with him into the surroundings in which a Bolshevist agent would sell a secret?" said the Professor with some impatience. "When he had received the key-word and tested it on a passage from one of these documents, he was to sign an order which would enable the Princess to draw the money. And it is practically certain that he was not poisoned, to prevent him getting away with the key-word, till after he had signed that order."

"Astucious," said young Mr. Belton in approving accents. "But I should never

have guessed that Popsy had brain-storms like that. Still, she does seem a bit of a snake herself."

"A bit of a snake!" said the Professor with immense asperity. "A much worse snake than any daboia that ever lived!" He paused, scowling; then he went on: "Well, the Home Office wants that key-word quickly and it will pay you five hundred pounds for getting it—and your expenses. I take it from your paying me a visit that you are very short of money."

"Well, as a matter of fact, you're right, sir. At the moment my name is Beanless Ben," said Mr. Belton, frankly.

"Then I'll give you a cheque for thirty pounds; and you can let me know what your expenses are," said the Professor. "Can you get in touch with the Princess at once?"

"To-night," said Mr. Belton, confidently. "If she isn't at the 99, she'll be at the Forty Sinners."

"And you said that she didn't move in Bohemian circles?" said the Professor, scornfully.

He wrote out a cheque for thirty pounds and gave Mr. Belton the document in cipher with the square clipped on to it. Also he gave him the order, which, once he had signed it, would enable the Princess to draw the money.

Then he said: "The anti-toxin had better be injected at the latest possible moment. I'll send a doctor to your flat at seven sharp to inject it. It'll take you a couple of hours to get over the effects of it; but then you should be immune from daboia venom for a good twelve hours."

"It'll be done, or I shall be done inside eight," said Mr. Belton, cheerfully, as he put the cheque into his note-case. He paused and looked at his uncle and grinned, and added: "If it doesn't work and I don't see you again, I'll just wish you good luck, sir."

The Professor frowned at him in a sudden disquiet, hesitated, and said: "I wish—I wish—oh, it'll work all right. And after all it is of the greatest importance that these documents should be deciphered; and it's time that you did something to justify your existence."

"So it is. So it is," said his nephew, cheerfully, and held out his hand.

The Professor gripped it and wrung it, and then came to the front door with him and let him out and said good-bye. He stood on the step and watched, with eyes full of disquiet, Mr. Belton stride briskly along the pavement and turn the corner, and twice he plucked rather nervously at his chin.

Cheered by the prospect of action, Mr. Belton kept forgetting for as long as eleven minutes at a time that Miss Kitty Glentworth had cast him off for ever. He made an excellent lunch, and with a friend attended a *matinée* of the latest musical comedy. He did not think it right to take the risk of passing out of the world without having seen it.

At seven o'clock the doctor, a cheerful, but beavered, man with an uncommonly clever face, arrived at his flat, injected the anti-toxin, and declared, with much more confidence than his uncle had shown, that Mr. Belton was now immune from the venom of Russell's viper for a good twelve hours. Feeling that

he would like to know, if someone did contrive to inject a shot of the venom into him, whether the anti-toxin was really working, Mr. Belton asked him how the venom acted. The doctor said that any not immune person who was bitten by the snake would first be afflicted with nausea and a splitting headache, presently become paralysed, and then fall into a coma from which he would not awake. He stayed on for nearly an hour watching the effects of the anti-toxin. It gave Mr. Belton considerable discomfort in the way of nausea, a headache, twitchings, and a temperature. At a few minutes past eight, after assuring him that the effects of the anti-toxin had been everything that could be desired, the doctor departed.

At nine o'clock feeling better but still rather shaky, Mr. Belton walked up to the 99 Club. He found the Princess Obrenovski, who had come early in order to get some dancing before the room became crowded, dining with another young lady. They welcomed his suggestion that he should join them.

Mr. Belton was not talkative. The anti-toxin was still troubling him. The Princess talked for the three of them. Her chief theme was herself. He kept looking at her with wondering eyes, trying to discover evidence of the serpent in her. He could find none. She was the perfect type of Slav woman with a dash of the Tartar in her. Nature had moulded her with clumsy fingers. Her cheek-bones protruded slightly; her unfinished nose was rather thick, with a rounded, rather protruding tip; her lips were rather thick and shapeless; her black hair was lustreless; her brown eyes were for the most part dull, though they lit up sufficiently when she talked; her figure was clumsy; she was well-meaning but rather heavy in the dance. She had many feelings and always talked about them. She could not be more than twenty-two.

Bearing in mind that this might well be his last dinner, Mr. Belton did himself well and drank plenty of champagne. His young companions did themselves well and also drank plenty of champagne. It was half-past ten before he felt like dancing; then he embarked on a fox-trot with the Princess.

The anti-toxin, or the champagne on top of it, had robbed Mr. Belton of any diplomatic tendency he may have possessed. He came straight to the matter in hand.

He said: "I've been told to push a little money at you, Popsy."

"Push money—at *me!*" cried the Princess in lively astonishment.

"Yes. It's a little business of a key-word to a cipher," said Mr. Belton in almost jocular accents.

He felt her stiffen against his arm; and she bent backwards to stare at him with incredulous eyes. He had a strange and uncommonly strong feeling that he was an intruder.

He was. In the mind of the Princess his activities were confined wholly to her social life; he had suddenly intruded into the political.

"I don't know what you're talking about," she said; but her tone did not carry conviction.

"Oh, it's quite all right," he said in a reassuring tone. "I'm not giving anything away."

He felt her relax. But again she declared that she did not know what he was talking about. They had gone right round the room before she had re-arranged her ideas about him and decided to treat with him. Then she made him give her his word of honour to tell no one anything about it.

Then, with a winning smile and in winning accents, she said: "Have you got the money, Dicky?"

"I have not—only an order to sign when I've got the key-word and tested it," said Mr. Belton.

She looked up at him with a languishing glance and said: "Then it will be all right if I tell you the key-word. You can sign the order at once."

"When I've tested the key-word," said Mr. Belton firmly.

"Don't you trust me, Dicky?" she said haughtily.

"Till all's blue. But instructions are instructions," said Mr. Belton rather more firmly.

She was silent; she appeared to be thinking hard.

It was unfortunate that Miss Kitty Glentworth, who was not on in the third act of the play "Driver's Folly," in which she had a moderate part, entered the room just in time to catch the winning smile and then the languishing glance. She had cast Mr. Belton off for what she had been pleased to consider his perfidy in making himself uncommonly amiable to another lady. They had often quarrelled about his amiability to other ladies. She did not make sufficient allowance for his natural bent. He never could refrain from being amiable to a pretty girl. He was like that. Now he was being amiable to the Princess. She had for some time suspected the Princess of designs. That suspicion was now verified. Of course, it was no longer any business of hers. She told herself that it was not. Nevertheless her beautiful eyes flashed fiercely as she scowled on the unconscious couple; she walked to a table with her head high, trying to rid her face of the scowl.

The Princess came out of her reflections and said with a yet more languishing glance: "But you *do* think I would deceive you, Dicky."

"Never!" said Mr. Belton, in loud, loyal accents. "I tell you instructions are instructions, and I've got to stick to them."

Undaunted, the Princess spent the next twenty minutes trying to persuade him to disregard those instructions; and her smiles grew yet more winning, her glances more languishing.

Miss Kitty Glentworth observed this softening process with an anger that grew more and more intense. She had not expected Mr. Belton to accept his dismissal without further protest or entreaty, or to recover from it so quickly. She had broken off their engagement deliberately; but she felt that this behaviour of his was outrageous. She was of an uncommonly jealous disposition; she felt, unreasonably enough, that she was being shamelessly robbed; her anger was becoming fury.

It was at last borne in upon the Princess that the political Mr. Belton was a

very different person from the social one. She ceased to languish at him. Indeed, she cut the patter, came to the 'osses, and asked in a business-like tone whether he had with him the means of testing the key-word. He said that he had, that she had only to give him the key-word and he would sit down and test it and sign the order inside of five minutes.

"But that is impossible!" she said, hastily. "I am watched—always." She paused, then added: "And you do not suppose that I know the key-word. I know only where it is. I can get it."

Mr. Belton had the strongest feeling that she was not telling him the truth. He looked round the room for those who watched her. He knew everyone in it. No one of them could be watching her. Few of them were capable of watching a child of five. But, of course, there were the waiters. Besides, she must have given the key-word to the man who had been poisoned, or he would not have signed the order; or had she merely put him in touch with the person who knew the key-word? That must be it. He could not see anything of the snake about her; he could not believe that she had had a hand in the actual poisoning.

"Well, let's go and get it," he said.

At the words a pleased light just flickered in the eyes of the Princess. She said: "Not together. My car is parked in Pardon Street. I will go and wait for you in it. Come in five minutes."

"Right-o!" said Mr. Belton.

She emptied her glass and rose and went. Mr. Belton looked at his watch. Agog for action, he kept looking at it. The five minutes passed slowly. Kitty, relieved by the going of the Princess, saw that he kept looking at it. He rose with an uncommonly alert air. Of a sudden another suspicion seized her: he was going to the Princess! She gave him about two minutes. As she came out of the door of the dancing-room he was leaving the club. She followed him, furious. She wished to make sure, then demonstrate to him triumphantly that he had the shallow and perfidious nature of which she had complained.

When the Princess came out of the 99, a big, respectably-dressed man, in a bowler hat and No. 11 shoes, who was standing on the opposite pavement, moved down the street, keeping level with her. At the top of Pardon Street he stood still to light a cigarette. A motor-cyclist thirty yards down the street stopped tinkering with his engine and lit a cigarette.

The driver of a big car, sixty yards down the street, turned and said to its occupants, Detective-Inspectors Halliday, Gedge, and Tomkins, and the doctor who had injected the anti-toxin into Mr. Belton: "Here they come!"

The Princess sat down in the driver's seat of her two-seater and fiddled with the gadgets. The motor-cyclist tinkered again with his engine. For five minutes nothing happened. Then Mr. Belton came briskly down the street. As he was stepping into the car of the Princess, Miss Kitty Glentworth came round the corner. The Princess, getting her car out of the line, did not see her; Mr. Belton, talking to the Princess, did not see her. She broke into a little run, sprang into

her own two-seater, and came out of the line just ahead of the big car containing the detectives.

It was just before the theatre traffic, and the going was good. In this order the four motor vehicles moved up Regent Street, the motor-cyclist twenty yards behind the Princess, Kitty Glentworth ten yards behind the motor-cyclist, the big car thirty yards behind Kitty. The Princess had not enough of the cunning of the serpent to guess that she was being followed; she had not been followed on that earlier journey to Thames Ditton. At Oxford Circus she turned to the left. The motor-cyclist and Kitty turned after her.

Then came the hitch. After Kitty turned, the policeman on point-duty held up the traffic; the big car was held up behind a bus and a taxi. By the time one of the detectives had run to the policeman and way was made for it nearly two minutes had been lost. The motor-cyclist, on the look-out, saw what had happened. When the Princess turned up Orchard Street he pulled up and said a few words to the policeman at the bottom of it. Kitty Glentworth passed him. He bucketed up Orchard Street and passed Kitty. At the bottom of Upper Baker Street and again at the top of the St. John's Wood Road he stopped to speak to the policeman on duty. The Princess turned into the Grove End Road. There was no policeman at the corner of it. She ran along the Grove End Road and turned into that little *cul-de-sac*, Melina Place.

She had slowed down to turn into it; Kitty slowed down also, so that when she turned to follow and saw that it was a *cul-de-sac*, she was able to switch out of it and come to a stop just beyond the opposite corner, slip out of her car, and peep round. The Princess had stopped nearly at the bottom; she was standing on the pavement talking to Mr. Belton. She went through a door in the wall, leaving him there. He lit a cigarette and stepped back into the car.

The motor-cyclist ran slowly past the top of Melina Place. He saw the car of the Princess; he saw Kitty peeping round the corner. He turned, went back along the Grove End Road about forty yards, dismounted, and began to blow his horn—one long honk and two short ones—again and again and again. When the big car came to the policeman at the bottom of the St. John's Wood Road and learnt that he had not seen him, it would come back.

The Princess came through the door in the wall, hurried up the path of the little garden, went through the front door of the little house at the end of it and into a room on her right. It was panelled; an old oak gate-leg table stood in the middle of it, an older oak armchair, high-backed, with a very thin cushion on its seat, stood on the right of the fireplace, four old oak chairs stood against the walls, a cushioned oak settle in the recess on the left of the fireplace. She crossed the room to the armchair, pulled it to the top of the table, and took the cushion from the seat of it. Then she pressed a button in the back of the chair. Three inches from the edge of the seat, on the left, there shot up the needle of a hypodermic syringe. She pressed another button and the needle sank back into the seat of the chair. Smiling an uncommonly ugly smile, she went to the oak corner cupboard, in the corner on the left of the fireplace above the settle, took from it a pen, an inkpot, blotting paper, notepaper, envelopes, and a small

bottle. She set the writing materials on the table in front of the armchair. Then she knelt down beside the armchair, took from under its seat a hypodermic syringe, filled it carefully from a small bottle, and put it back. She rose, a yet uglier smile wreathing her thick lips, and put the bottle back in the cupboard. Then she sat down in the armchair, wrote on a sheet of paper "Paris," and enclosed it in an envelope. With brightly shining eyes she hurried back to Mr. Belton.

"There is no one in the house. I have found the key-word!" she cried in excited accents, waving the envelope at him. "Come along."

Mr. Belton sprang from the car and followed her through the door in the wall.

Another wave of jealous fury surged through Kitty Glentworth. She stood undecided for about twenty seconds, then went briskly down the street. To her surprise she saw the gleam of the key in the lock of the garden door. The unmethodical Slavonic mind of the Princess had caused her, in her excitement, to leave it there. Kitty opened the door a few inches and looked at the dark house. Then, resolved to have all the evidence of Mr. Belton's perfidy before demonstrating it to him, she stepped into the garden and shut the door. The motor-cyclist came quickly to the top of Melina Place, dismounted, and again began to honk a long honk and two short ones. In that quiet neighbourhood the sound would carry half a mile.

The policeman at the bottom of Orchard Street sent the big car up Baker Street; the policeman at the bottom of Upper Baker Street sent it up Park Road; the policeman at the end of Park Road sent it down the St. John's Wood Road. It ran past Grove End Road to Maida Vale. The policeman at the bottom of St. John's Wood Road had not seen a two-seater car, driven by a lady and followed by a motor-cyclist. The big car turned and went back up the St. John's Wood Road slowly. It stopped at the corner of Hanover Terrace and then moved slowly on. Midway between Hamilton Terrace and the Grove End Road the driver heard a motor-horn honking a long honk and then two short ones again and again, away on the left. He drove quickly up the Grove End Road and came to the motor-cyclist.

The three detectives and the doctor stepped out of the tonneau. The motor-cyclist told them quickly that Mr. Belton and the Princess had driven down Melina Place, that a second lady had come in the car standing at the opposite corner, watched them, and gone down Melina Place after them.

"How long can we give them?" said Inspector Halliday to the doctor.

"Anything up to a quarter of an hour," said the doctor; and he looked at his watch.

"That will give the Princess a chance to make her getaway," said Inspector Halliday.

"Just stick the car across the road and block it, Hawkins. It will save a lot of trouble if we collar her on the spot."

The Princess ushered Mr. Belton into the room furnished with old oak and

pushed him into the armchair. She tore open the envelope, looked at the sheet of paper, and said in excited accents: "The word is 'Paris'!"

"Right-o," said Mr. Belton, cheerfully, and took from his breast pocket the document with the square clipped to it and set about decoding it. He worked at it for perhaps four minutes. At the end of the second minute he was frowning. The frown deepened.

Then he looked up and said: "A lemon. My name is *not* Walter the Human Boo. Cough up the right word, Popsy darling."

"But it *is* the right word; It *is!* You humbug me!" cried the Princess.

"Oh, cough it up!" he said impatiently. The Princess stormed and protested for a good two minutes. Mr. Belton, unmoved, preserved an amiable air. The Princess ground her teeth. Then of a sudden she was calm.

"You're too clever, Dicky—much too clever," she said, with a queer laugh that bared her teeth a little. "But you promise that you'll sign the order whatever happens?"

"I've promised once," said Mr. Belton, impatiently.

"The word is 'Popsy,'" she said.

"Of course. It would be!" said Mr. Belton; and he took up the pen and got to work again.

The Princess stepped behind the chair and leant over the back, watching him. He could not see that she was scowling, that her nostrils were dilated, that she was breathing quickly.

The middle finger of her right hand rested, ever so lightly, on the button which worked the spring.

At the end of the second minute a pleased smile illumined Mr. Belton's face. At the end of the third minute he said, triumphantly:

"This time you're right. And now for the reward of—vice."

He took the order from his pocket and signed it. As his pen rose from the completed "n," the Princess pressed the button. The needle ran into his thigh. He sprang up with a sharp howl.

The Princess snatched up the order and was through the door like a knife. She snapped it to, turned the key in the lock, ran out of the house and across the garden to her car. She sprang into it, started it, turned, and came up the street, to find a clumsy chauffeur with his big car, half-jammed, right across the road, trying to back out of it. She shouted to him to clear out of the way and brought her car to a stop ten feet from his. Then, before she knew what was happening, Inspector Halliday had both her wrists in a vice-like grip and was hauling her out of the car.

As the door snapped to, Mr. Belton swore. Then he dashed to it. The house might be old, but the lock on that door was new. He rushed to the window and threw up the sash. It was shuttered with heavy shutters, barred on the outside. He hammered on them and yelled. Someone in the neighbouring houses might hear him. He paused to listen for twenty seconds, then hammered and yelled again.

Kitty heard him hammering and yelling. It increased the astonishment aroused

in her by the inexplicable flight of the Princess. She recognized the urgent note in his clamour; but she had no desire to help him. If in the course of the nefarious exercise of perfidy he had got himself into trouble, let him get himself out of it. At any rate, she was not going to help him at once. She was on the opposite side of the house to that at which he was hammering and clamouring; she walked round it and found that the unmethodical Princess had left the front door ajar. She stood hesitating what to do. Of a sudden Mr. Belton's clamouring and shouting stopped.

A sudden wave of nausea had swept through him. *The anti-toxin had not worked!*

He came away from the window, drew a chair from the wall to the table, sat down on it, and stared in front of him with the dazed air of one who faces the worst, and that worst inevitable. There was no chance of getting to a hospital in time. These devils had only needed to make a prison to hold a man a few minutes and the poison would keep him in it.

The thought that he was going to die, painfully, inside of half an hour gave him a sinking feeling that increased the nausea. He had faced death often enough in the old days; but this was different. Then, at the very worst, there had always been a chance. This was hopeless. He stared at the wall in front of him without seeing it. He saw a hundred things, a hundred scenes. The dancing-room of the 99 Club he had just left, the crowded theatre in which he had spent the afternoon came first, then scene after scene.

In nearly every one of them the chief figure was Kitty—Kitty happy, Kitty sad, Kitty angry, Kitty in ballrooms, on the stage, in restaurants, on the river, in the country. He had lost Kitty. He had not really believed that he had lost her when she cast him off. Now he *had* lost her. He had lost everything. It was not even slipping away; it had gone, absolutely gone. He almost sobbed.

Then he pulled himself together and ground his teeth. A raging desire to balk the devils who had robbed him of Kitty and the bright world surged through him. He *would* get the key-word to his uncle. But how, with a few minutes of failing powers left, could he? Yet he must. He cudgelled his brains, rejecting device after device. Then the idea came. He took a sheet of notepaper, tore a small square out of it, wrote on it, in big letters and deep, "The key-word is Popsy," let them dry, rolled it into a ball and swallowed it.

There would certainly be an autopsy.

Another wave of nausea swept through him. He took another sheet of paper and began to write a farewell letter to Kitty. He wrote:

"My Dear Kitty,

"You were absolutely wrong about Mabel Carruthers. I never did care a scrap for anyone but you, and you. . . ."

Someone tried the handle of the door. He turned towards it sharply. The key turned in the lock; the door opened; in came Kitty herself, her eyes still blazing, her face still pale. He stared at her with his mouth open.

"So I was quite right about you," she said in terrible accents. "The Princess

now. The very moment you got rid of me! I should like to hear what you have to say for yourself."

"I *am* Walter the Human Boo," said Mr. Belton in a tone half exasperated, half dismal. "That's what I've got to say for myself. But get to my uncle at once—straight—and tell him that the key-word is 'Popsy.' Don't forget—'Popsy.'"

Kitty stared at him in a blank bewilderment. "What do you mean?" she said. "Are you mad or drunk?"

"Neither, worse luck," said Mr. Belton, in merely dismal accents. "I let that little devil inject a shot of daboia poison into me—Russell's viper, you know. I came to buy the key-word of a cipher off her. She's a Bolshi agent. The key-word's 'Popsy'—the damned little snake's own name!"

Kitty stared at him with her eyes opened their widest; her mouth went suddenly dry; the anger in her died in panic.

"What d-d-do you mean—d-d-daboia p-p-poison—Russell's viper?" she stammered.

"She fired a shot of it into my thigh. There's a needle in that cushion." He pointed to the armchair. "I'm a goner, old girl," said Mr. Belton quietly; and he rose and took her gently in his arms and kissed her.

His eyes seemed to be devouring her. They would not see her long.

"But there must be something to be done! Can't I—can't I suck the poison out of the wound?" she cried in desperate accents.

"You can't. The damned needle went too far in."

There came a banging on the garden door.

"Here they are! Get out! Lock the door! It's no good bothering about me," cried Mr. Belton. "The key-word—'Popsy'—is the important thing! Get off! Hide in the garden! Slip out when they come into the house! Get to my uncle with the key-word! And—and—yes—tell—him that you're to have the five hundred quid for bringing it."

"I won't! I won't! I won't leave you!" she cried; and she threw her arms round his neck, and, kissing him, burst into a storm of sobs.

The garden door went with a crash.

"I'm afraid you can't get away now. The devils will get you, too! Oh, why didn't I think to bring a gun!" cried Mr. Belton; and he faced the door with his right arm round her waist.

It flew open, and in came Inspector Halliday, followed by the doctor.

"Did they get a jab at you?" cried the doctor anxiously.

"They got it—at least that little devil, the Princess, did. The needle is in the cushion of that armchair. The key-word is 'Popsy.' Don't forget, 'Popsy,'" said Mr. Belton.

"Good man!" said the doctor. "How are you feeling?"

"As sick as a cat," said Mr. Belton.

"Then you must have had a devil of a dose! Off with your coat! Quick!" said the doctor; and he opened his bag.

Mr. Belton was quick getting his coat off and opening his shirt; the doctor was

quick injecting another shot of anti-toxin. Then he pulled out a flask of whisky, with very little water in it, and made him drink all of it.

"Don't you worry. That'll set you right," he said, cheerfully, and made him lie down on the cushioned settle.

Kitty sat down beside him and took his hand and stared at his pale face with eyes full of anguish.

The other two detectives came in with the Princess. She was snivelling. Inspector Halliday took the cushion from the armchair and gingerly he examined it. Then he ripped the cover off it and spread the stuffing on the table and searched it thoroughly.

"But there isn't any needle," he said, in puzzled accents. "It must have been your imagination, Mr. Belton."

"Imagination be damned!" said Mr. Belton with extraordinary tartness. "My thigh is stinging like the devil. Take a look at the chair—perhaps it's in the chair. I heard a click—two clicks."

The Inspector examined the seat of the chair and found the hole up which the needle shot.

"Try the back. The little devil was leaning against the back," said Mr. Belton, who was still taking notice.

"I was never near the chair! I did nothing! I did not know about the chair!" cried the Princess.

No one took any notice of her. The Inspector found the right button and pressed it. Up shot the needle. He laid the chair on its side, and found, screwed to the bottom of it, a little box that evidently contained the mechanism which raised the syringe and thrust in the plunger and forced the poison out.

"That's fine!" cried the detective. "All the evidence of attempted murder will be in this box—a long stretch for the lady."

The Princess protested shrilly and snivelled louder.

For the next five minutes they were busy taking down Mr. Belton's exact account of what had happened. He signed it. Whether it was the whisky, or whether it was the second shot of anti-toxin, he was feeling no more sick than he had felt. If anything, he was feeling less sick. Kitty sat, still holding his hand and gazing at him with eyes which held a world of passion and despair.

At intervals the doctor felt his pulse and made cheering remarks. The Princess snivelled on. Inspectors Halliday and Tomkins went away to search the house. The minutes passed. A little colour came into Mr. Belton's cheeks; his eyes grew brighter.

Of a sudden he sat up on the couch and said in a tone of satisfaction: "I'm feeling better. That anti-toxin must have caught on."

In her relief Kitty buried her face in her hands and cried in the most unaffected fashion.

Mr. Belton patted her back and said: "Steady on, old girl. There's nothing to worry about now," slipped off the couch, stood up, and shook himself.

"You're right. You'll be all right now," said the doctor cheerfully. "But take

it easy for a day or two. And you'd better get home and get to bed. We've got the lady and the chair."

Mr. Belton wasted no time. He thanked the doctor, slipped his arm through Kitty's and marched her out of the house. On the steps she took a tight hold of his arm and supported him carefully all the way to her car. He did not need support, but he appeared thoughtful. She took the driver's seat and started.

Then he said, thoughtfully: "Seeing how you've been—what you've been saying and doing, I don't believe you meant all you said the night before last."

"I was a little beast!" said Kitty, remorsefully. "I didn't mean *any* of it."

Mr. Belton's method of expressing his relief interfered with her driving.

Anthony Wynne

THE CYPRIAN BEES

from Hutchinson's Mystery Story Magazine, 1924

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Inspector Biles, of Scotland Yard, placed a small wooden box on the table in front of Dr. Hailey.

"There," he remarked in cheerful tones, "is a mystery which even you, my dear doctor, will scarcely be able to solve."

Dr. Hailey bent his great head, and examined the box with minute care. It was merely a hollowed-out block of wood, to which a lid, also of wood, was attached at one point by a nail. The lid rotated on this nail. He put out his hand to open it, but Biles checked that intention immediately.

"Take care!" he exclaimed; "there are three live bees in that box." He added, "There were four of them originally, but one stung a colleague of mine, who was incautious enough to pull the lid open without first finding out what it covered."

He leaned back in his chair, and drew a long whiff of the excellent cigar with which Dr. Hailey had supplied him. He remained silent, while a heavy vehicle went lumbering down Harley Street. Then he said:

"Last night, one of my men found the box lying in the gutter in Piccadilly Circus, just opposite the Criterion Theatre. He thought it looked peculiar, and brought it down to the Yard. We have a beekeeper of some distinction on the strength, and he declares that these insects are all workers, and that only a lunatic would carry them about in this fashion. Queens, it appears, are often transported in boxes."

Dr. Hailey raised his eyeglass and set it in his eye.

"So I have heard." He opened his snuff-box, and took a large pinch. "You know, of course, my dear Biles," he added, "what this particular box contained before the bees were put into it?"

"No—I don't."

"Serum—either anti-diphtheria serum or one of the other varieties. Practically every manufacturer of these products uses this type of receptacle for them."

"H'm!" Biles leaned forward in his chair. "So that means that, in all probability, the owner of the bees is a doctor. How very interesting!"

Dr. Hailey shook his head.

"It doesn't follow," he remarked. "The box was perhaps left in a patient's house after its contents had been used. The patient may have employed it for its present purpose."

Biles nodded. He appeared to hesitate a moment; then he said:

"The reason why I troubled you was that, last night, a woman was found dead at the wheel of a motor-car—a closed coupé—in Leicester Square. She had been stung by a bee just before her death."

He spoke in quiet tones, but his voice nevertheless revealed the fact that the disclosure he was making had assumed great importance in his mind. He added:

"The body was examined by a doctor almost immediately. He observed the sting, which was in her forehead. The dead bee was recovered later, from the floor of the car."

As he spoke he took another box from his pocket and opened it. He held it out to the doctor.

"You will notice that there are rather unusual markings on the bee's body—these yellow rings. Our expert says that they indicate a special breed, the Cyprian, and that these insects are notoriously very ill-natured. The peculiar thing is that the bees in the wooden box are also Cyprian bees."

Dr. Hailey picked up a large magnifying glass which lay on the table beside him, and focused it on the body of the insect. His knowledge of bees was not extensive, but he recognised that this was not the ordinary brown English type. He set the glass down again, and leaned back in his chair.

"It is certainly very extraordinary," he declared. "Have you any theory?"

Biles shook his head. "None, beyond the supposition that the shock caused by the sting was probably the occasion for the woman's sudden collapse. She was seen to pull quickly to the side of the road, and stop the car, so she must have had a presentiment of what was coming. I suppose heart-failure might be induced by a sting?"

"It is just possible." Dr. Hailey took more snuff. "Once, long ago," he said, "I had personal experience of a rather similar case—that of a beekeeper who was stung some years after he had given up his own apiary. He died in about five minutes. But that was a clear case of anaphylaxis."

"I don't understand."

Dr. Hailey thought a moment. "Anaphylaxis," he explained, "is the name given to one of the most amazing phenomena in the whole of medical science. If a human being receives an injection of serum or blood, or any extract or

fluid from the animal body, a tremendous sensitiveness is apt to develop, afterwards, towards that particular substance. For example, an injection of the white of a duck's egg will, after the lapse of a week or so, render a man so intensely sensitive to this particular egg-white that, if a further injection is given, instant death may result.

"Even if a duck's egg is eaten, there may be violent sickness and collapse, though hen's eggs will cause no ill effect. Queerly enough, however, if the injection is repeated within, say, a day of its first administration no trouble occurs. For the sensitiveness to develop, it is essential that time should elapse between the first injection and the second one. Once the sensitiveness has developed, it remains active for years. The beekeeper, whose death I happened to witness, had often been stung before: but he had not been stung for a very long time."

"Good God!" Biles's face wore an expression of new interest. "So it is possible that this may actually be a case of—*murder!*"

He pronounced the word in tones of awe. Dr. Hailey saw that already his instincts as a man-hunter were quickening.

"It is just possible. But do not forget, my dear Biles, that the murderer using this method would require to give his victim a preliminary dose—by inoculation—of bee-poison, because a single sting would scarcely be enough to produce the necessary degree of sensitiveness. That is to say, he would require to exercise an amount of force which would inevitably defeat his purpose—*unless he happened to be a doctor.*"

"Ah! the wooden serum-box!" The detective's voice thrilled.

"Possibly. A doctor undoubtedly could inject bee-poison, supposing he possessed it, instead of ordinary serum, or of an ordinary vaccine. It would hurt a good deal—but patients expect inoculation to hurt them."

Biles rose. "There is no test, is there," he asked, "by which it would be possible to detect the presence of this sensitiveness you speak of in a dead body?"

"None."

"So we can only proceed by means of circumstantial evidence." He drew a sharp breath. "The woman has been identified as the widow of an artist named Bardwell. She had a flat—a luxurious one—in Park Mansions, and seems to have been well off. But we have not been able to find any of her relations so far." He glanced at his watch. "I am going there now. I suppose I couldn't persuade you to accompany me?"

Dr. Hailey's rather listless eyes brightened. For answer he rose, towering above the detective in that act.

"My dear Biles, you know that you can always persuade me."

The flat in Park Mansions was rather more, and yet rather less, than luxurious. It bespoke prodigality, but it bespoke also restlessness of mind—as though its owner had felt insecure in her enjoyment of its comforts. The rooms were too full, and their contents were saved from vulgarity only by sheer carelessness of their bestowal. This woman seemed to have bought anything, and to have cared for nothing. Thus, in her dining-room, an exquisite Queen Anne sideboard was set cheek by jowl with a most horrible Victorian armchair made of imita-

tion walnut. In the drawing-room there were flower-glasses of the noblest period of Venetian craftsmanship, in which beauty was held captive in wonderful strands of gold, and beside these, shocking and obscene examples of "golden glass" ware from some third-rate Bohemian factory.

Dr. Hailey began to form a mental picture of the dead woman. He saw her, changeable, greedy, gaudy, yet with a certain instinctive charm—the kind of woman who, if she is young and beautiful, gobbles a man up. Women of that sort, his experience had shown him, were apt to drive their lovers to despair with their extravagances or their infidelities. Had the owner of the bees embarked on his terrible course in order to secure himself against the mortification of being supplanted by some more attractive rival? Or was he merely removing from his path a woman of whom he had grown tired? In any case, if the murder theory was correct, he must have stood in the relationship to the dead girl of doctor to patient, and he must have possessed an apiary of his own.

A young detective, whom Biles introduced as Tadcaster, had already made a careful examination of the flat. He had found nothing, not even a photograph. Nor had the owners of neighbouring flats been able to supply any useful information. Mrs. Bardwell, it appeared, had had men friends who had usually come to see her after dark. They had not, apparently, been in the habit of writing to her, or, if they had, she had destroyed all their letters. During the last few weeks, she seemed to have been without a servant.

"So you have found nothing?" Biles's tones were full of disappointment.

"Nothing, sir—unless, indeed, this is of any importance."

Tadcaster held out a crumpled piece of paper. It was a shop receipt, bearing the name of *The Times* Book Club, for a copy of *The Love-Songs of Robert Browning*. There was no name on it.

Biles handed it to Dr. Hailey, who regarded it for a few moments in silence, and then asked:

"Where did you find this?"

"In the fireplace of the bedroom."

The doctor's eyes narrowed.

"It does not strike me," he said, "that such a collection of poems would be likely to interest the owner of this flat."

He folded the slip, and put it carefully into his pocket-book. He added:

"On the other hand, Browning's love-songs do appeal very strongly to some women." He fixed his eyeglass and regarded the young detective. "You have not found the book itself, have you?"

"No, sir. There are a few novels in the bedroom, but no poetry of any kind."

Dr. Hailey nodded. He asked to be shown the collection, and made a detailed examination of it. The novels were all of the lurid, sex type. It was as he had anticipated. He opened each of the books, and glanced at the fly-leaves. They were all blank. He turned to Biles.

"I am ready to bet that Mrs. Bardwell did not pay that bill at the Book Club," he declared. "And I am ready to bet also that this book was not bought for her."

The detective shrugged his shoulders.

"Probably not," he said unconcernedly.

"Then, why should the receipt for it be lying in this room?"

"My dear doctor, how should I know? I suppose, because the man who possessed it chose to throw it away here."

The doctor shook his head.

"Men do not buy collections of love-songs for themselves, nor, for that matter, do women. They buy them—almost invariably—to give to people they are interested in. Everybody, I think, recognises that."

He broke off. A look of impatience came into Biles's face.

"Well?"

"Therefore, a man does not, as a rule, reveal to one woman the fact that he has made such a purchase on behalf of another. I mean, it is difficult to believe that any man on intimate terms with Mrs. Bardwell would have invited her jealousy by leaving such plain evidence of his interest in another woman lying about in her rooms. I assume, you see, that no man would give that poor lady this particular book."

Biles shrugged his shoulders. The point seemed to him immaterial. He glanced round the bedroom with troubled eyes.

"I wish," he declared, "that we had something to go on—something definite, leading towards some individual."

His words were addressed impartially to his subordinate and to Dr. Hailey. The former looked blank, but the doctor's expression was almost eager. He raised his eyeglass, and put it into his eye.

"My dear Biles," he said, "we have something definite to go on. I was about to suggest to you when you interrupted me that the receipt for the book probably fell from the pocket of the purchaser through a hole in that pocket. Just as the little box containing the additional bees, which he had not found it necessary to release, was destined to fall later, when the man, having assured himself that an insect of unimpaired vigour was loose and on the wing, descended in Piccadilly Circus from Mrs. Bardwell's car."

He paused. The detective had turned to him, interested once more. The thought crossed Dr. Hailey's mind that it was a pity Biles had not been gifted by Providence with an appreciation of human nature as keen as his grasp of material circumstances. He allowed his eyeglass to drop, in a manner which proclaimed that he had shot his bolt. He asked:

"You have not, perhaps, taken occasion to watch a man receiving a shop receipt for goods he has just bought and paid for? Believe me, a spectacle full of instruction in human nature. The receipt is handed, as a rule, by a girl, and the man, as a rule, pushes it into his nearest pocket, because he does not desire to be so rude or so untidy as to drop it on the floor. Shyness, politeness, and tidiness, my dear Biles, are all prominent elements in our racial character."

Again he broke off, this time to take a pinch of snuff. The two detectives watched that process with some impatience.

"A man with a hole in his coat-pocket—a hole not very large, yet large enough to allow a piece of crumpled paper to work its way out as the wearer of the coat

strode up and down the floor of the room—is not that a clue? A doctor, perhaps, with, deep in his soul, the desire for such women as Mrs. Bardwell—cheap, yet attractive women——"

"I thought you expressed the opinion that he bought the love-songs for some other woman!" Biles snapped.

"Exactly. Some other woman sufficiently like Mrs. Bardwell to attract him, though evidently possessed of a veneer of education to which Mrs. Bardwell could lay no claim." Dr. Hailey's large, kindly face grew thoughtful. "Has it not struck you," he asked, "that, though a man may not be faithful to any one woman, he is almost always faithful to a type? Again and again I have seen in first and second wives the same qualities of mind and appearance, both good and bad. Indeed, I would go so far as to say that our first loves and our last are kindred spirits, recognised and chosen by needs and desires which do not change, or change but little, throughout the course of life."

"Even so, my dear Hailey."

Biles's look of perplexity had deepened. The doctor, however, was too eager to be discouraged.

"If Mrs. Bardwell was, in fact, murdered," he continued, "the figure of her murderer is not, I think, very difficult to visualise: a doctor in early middle life—because the dead woman is at least thirty—with a practice in the country, but the tastes of a townsman; a trifle careless of his clothes, since he tolerates holes in his pockets, a sentimental egoist, since he buys Browning's love-songs while plans of murder are turning over in his mind——" He broke off, and thought a moment. "It is probable that Mrs. Bardwell was an expensive luxury. Such women, too, fight like tigers for the possession of the men they rely on. Yet, though she had undoubtedly obtained a great, perhaps a terrible, hold on him, she had failed to make him marry her."

He turned to Biles, and readjusted his eyeglass.

"Why do you suppose," he asked, "Mrs. Bardwell failed to make this doctor marry her?"

"I have no idea." The detective's tones were crisp, almost to the point of abruptness.

Dr. Hailey moved across the room to a writing-table which stood near the window. He took a sheet of paper, and marked a small circle on it. Around this he drew a much larger circle. He returned to the detectives, who stood watching him.

"Here is London," he said, pointing to the small circle, "and here is the country round it up to a distance of forty miles—that is to say, up to a two-hour journey by motor-car. As our doctor seems to make frequent visits to town, that is not, I think, too narrow a radius. Beyond about forty miles, London is no longer within easy reach."

He struck his pencil at two places through the circumference of the larger circle, marking off a segment.

"Here," he went on, "are the Surrey highlands, the area, within our district, where heather grows, and where, in consequence, almost everyone keeps bees."

He raised his head, and faced the two men, whose interest he seemed to have recaptured.

"It should not," he suggested, "be impossible to discover whether or not, within this area, there is a doctor in practice who keeps Cyprian bees, is constantly running up to London, wears an overcoat with a hole in one of the pockets, and lives apart from his wife."

"Good heavens!" Biles drew his breath sharply. His instincts as a man-hunter had reasserted themselves. He glanced at the doctor with an enthusiasm which lacked nothing of generosity. The younger detective, however, retained his somewhat critical expression.

"Why should the doctor be living apart from his wife?" he asked.

"Because, had she not left him as soon as he tired of her, he would probably have killed her long ago: and, in that case, he would almost certainly have married Mrs. Bardwell during the first flush of his devotion to her. I know these sensualists, who are also puffed up with literary vanity. Marriage possesses for them an almost incredible attractiveness."

He glanced at his watch as he spoke. The recollection of a professional appointment had come suddenly to his memory.

"If you are to follow up the clue, my dear Biles," he remarked, as he left the flat, "I hope you will let me know the result. *The Medical Directory* should serve as a useful starting-point."

Dr. Hailey was kept fully occupied during the next day, and was unable, in consequence, to pursue the mystery of the Cyprian bees any further. In the later afternoon, however, he rang up Inspector Biles at Scotland Yard. A voice, the tones of which were sufficiently dispirited, informed him that the whole of the home counties did not contain a doctor answering the description with which he had furnished the police.

"Mrs. Bardwell," Biles added, "kept a maid, who has been on holiday. She returned last night, and has now told us that her mistress received very few men at her flat, and that a doctor was not among the number. Of course, it is possible that a doctor may have called during the last fortnight, in the girl's absence. But, in the circumstances, I'm afraid we must look on the murder theory as rather far-fetched. After all, the dead woman possessed a car, and may have been in the country herself on the morning on which she was stung. Bees often get trapped in cars."

Dr. Hailey hung up the receiver, and took a pinch of snuff. He sat down in his big armchair, and closed his eyes that he might pass, in fresh review, the various scraps of evidence he had collected. If the dead woman had not received the doctor at her house, then the idea that they were on intimate terms could scarcely be maintained. In that case, the whole of his deductions must be invalidated. He got up and walked down Harley Street to *The Times* Book Club. He showed the receipt which he had retained, and asked if he might see the assistant who had conducted the sale. This girl remembered the incident clearly. It had occurred about a week earlier. The man who had bought the volume of poems was accompanied by a young woman.

"Did you happen to notice," Dr. Hailey asked, "what his companion looked like?"

"I think she was very much 'made up.' She had fair hair; but I can't say that I noticed her carefully."

"And the man?"

The girl shrugged her shoulders. "I'm afraid I don't remember him clearly. A business man, perhaps." She thought a moment. "He was a good deal older than she was, I should say."

Dr. Hailey left the shop, and walked back towards Harley Street. On one point, at least, he had not been mistaken. The purchaser of the *Love-Songs* was a man, and he had bought them for a woman who was not Mrs. Bardwell. Biles had mentioned that this lady had auburn hair. Why should the man have visited Mrs. Bardwell so soon after making this purchase? He sighed. After all, why not? Biles was quite right in thinking that no jury in the world would listen to evidence the only basis of which was character-reading at second hand. He reached his door, and was about to let himself into the house when a cab drew up beside him. The young detective, Tadcaster, to whom Biles had introduced him at Park Mansions, got out.

"Can I see you a moment, doctor?" he asked.

They entered the house together. Tadcaster produced a letter from his pocket, and handed it to Dr. Hailey. It was a prescription, written on Mrs. Bardwell's notepaper, and signed only with initials, which were nearly indecipherable.

"I found it after you had gone," the young man explained. "It was dispensed, as you can see, by a local chemist. To-day I have seen him, and he says he has had other similar prescriptions to dispense. But he has no idea who the writer is. Mrs. Bardwell had the medicine a few days ago."

Dr. Hailey read the prescription, which was a simple iron tonic. The signature was illegible. He shook his head.

"This does not carry us much further, I'm afraid," he declared.

"You can't tell from the initials who the doctor is."

"No."

"In that case, I think we shall have to throw our hands in." Tadcaster's voice expressed considerable disappointment. It was obvious that he had hoped to make reputation out of the solution of the mystery. "Your reasoning yesterday," he added, "impressed me very much, sir, if I may say so."

Dr. Hailey inclined his head, but his eyes were vacant. So a doctor had called on the dead woman recently—and also, apparently, made earlier visits—a doctor, too, whose prescriptions were unfamiliar to the local chemist. He turned to the young detective.

"I have just heard from Biles," he said, "that the maid has come back. Do you happen to know if she has any recollection of these professional visits?"

"I asked her that myself. She says that she knows nothing about them."

Again the far-away look came to the doctor's eyes. The fact that the prescriptions were written on Mrs. Bardwell's notepaper showed that they had been

given during an attendance at the flat. For what reason had the dead woman been at pains to hide her doctor's visits from her maid?

"Should I be troubling you very much," he said, "if I asked you to take me back to Park Mansions? I confess that I would like to ask that girl a few questions. A doctor can obtain information which is not likely to be imparted to any layman."

As they drove through the crowded streets, Dr. Hailey asked himself again the question which had caused him to embark on this fresh investigation. What reason had Mrs. Bardwell for hiding her need of medical attendance from her maid? Even supposing that her doctor was also her lover there seemed to be no sense in such a concealment. He opened his eyes and saw the stream of London's home-going population surging around the cab. Sweet-faced girls and splendid youths, mingled with women whose eyes told their story of disappointment, and men who wore pressing responsibility as an habitual expression. No wonder the police despaired of finding any one nameless human being in this vast tide of humanity, of hopes and fears, of desires and purposes!

The cab stopped. They entered the lift and came to the door of the flat. Tadcaster rang the bell. A moment later the door was opened by a young girl, who invited them to enter in tones which scarcely disguised the anxiety she apparently felt at the return of the police. She closed the door, and then led the way along the dim entrance corridor. She opened the door of the drawing-room.

As the light from the windows fell on her face, Dr. Hailey repressed an exclamation of amazement. He started, as though a new idea had sprung to his mind. A slight flush mounted to his cheeks. He raised his eyeglass and inserted it quickly in his eye.

"I have troubled you," he said to the girl, "because there are a few points about Mrs. Bardwell's health, before her fatal seizure, which I think you can help us to understand. I may say that I am a doctor, assisting the police."

"Oh, yes!"

The girl's voice was low. Her pretty, heavily powdered face seemed drawn with anxiety, and her eyes moved restlessly from one man to the other. She raised her hand in a gesture of uneasiness, and clasped her brow, seeming to press her golden curls into the white flesh.

"Perhaps it might be better if I spoke to you alone?"

Dr. Hailey's tones were very gentle. He looked at Tadcaster as he spoke, and the detective immediately got up and left the room. Then he turned to the girl.

"Your mistress," he asked, "discharged you from her employment a fortnight ago?"

The girl started violently, and all the blood seemed to ebb from her cheeks. Wild fear stared at him from her big, lustrous eyes.

"No!"

"My dear girl, if I may say so, you have everything to gain, nothing to lose, by telling the truth."

He spoke coldly, yet there was a reassuring note in his voice. He saw fear give place a little to that quality of weakness which he had expected to find in her

character—the quality which had attracted Mrs. Bardwell's lover, and which explained, in some subtle fashion, the gift of the *Love-Songs*. He repeated his question. The girl hung her head. She consented. He let his eyeglass fall.

"Because of your intimacy with a man she had been accustomed to look on as her own particular friend."

"Oh, no, no! It is not true!"

Again her eyes challenged him; she had thrown back her head, revealing the full roundness of her throat. The light gleamed among her curls. No wonder that this beauty had been able to dispossess her mistress!

"Listen to me." Dr. Hailey's face had grown stern. "You have denied that any doctor came to this flat—at least, so far as you know. As it happens, however, a number of prescriptions were dispensed for Mrs. Bardwell by the local chemist; so that, either she took great pains to hide from you the fact that she was calling in a doctor, or—you have not been speaking the truth."

"She did not tell me."

He raised his hand. "It will be easy," he said, "to get an answer to that question. If your mistress was really hiding her doctor's visits from you, she must have taken her prescriptions herself, personally, to the chemist. I shall find out from him later on whether or not that is so."

Again the girl's mood changed. She began to whimper, pressing a tiny lace handkerchief to her eyes in coquettish fashion.

Dr. Hailey drew a deep breath. He waited a moment before framing his next remark. Then he said:

"You realise, I suppose, that if a girl helps a man to commit a crime, she is as guilty as he is, in the eyes of the law."

"What do you mean?"

All her defences now were abandoned. She stood before him, abject in her terror, with staring eyes and trembling lips.

"That your presence here to-day proves you have had a share in this business. Why did you return to the flat?"

"Because—because—"

"*Because he—the man you are shielding—wanted to find out what the police were doing in the place?*"

She tottered towards him, and laid her hands on his arm.

"Oh, God, I am so frightened," she whispered.

"You have reason—to be frightened."

He led her to a chair, but suddenly she seemed to get her strength anew. Her grasp on his arm tightened.

"I didn't want him to do it," she cried, in tones of anguish. "I swear that I didn't. And I swear that I have no idea, even yet, what he did do. We were going to be married—immediately."

"Married!" His voice seemed to underline the word.

"I swear that. It was honest and above board, only he had her on his hands, and she had wasted so much of his money."

For the first time her voice rang true. She added:

"His wife cost a lot, too, though she was not living with him. She died a month ago."

They stood facing one another. In the silence of the room, the ticking of an ornate little clock on the mantelshelf was distinctly audible.

Dr. Hailey leaned forward.

"His name?" he asked.

"No, I shall not tell you."

She had recaptured her feeble courage. It gleamed from her eyes, for an instant transforming even her weakness. The vague knowledge that she loved this man in her paltry, immoral way, came to him. He was about to repeat his demand, when the door of the room opened. Tadcaster came in with a small, leather-bound volume in his hand.

The girl uttered a shrill cry and sprang towards him; but Dr. Hailey anticipated that move. He held her firmly.

"It is the collection of Browning's *Love-Songs*," the detective said. "I found it lying open in the next room. There is an inscription signed 'Michael Cornwall.'"

He held the book out for the doctor's inspection, but Dr. Hailey's face had grown as pale, almost, as that of the girl by his side.

He repeated the name—"Michael Cornwall"—almost like a man in a dream.

. . . . . .

The place was hidden among its trees. Dr. Hailey walked up the avenue with slow steps. The thought of the mission which had brought him to this lovely Hampstead house lay—as it had lain through all the hours of the night—like death on his spirits. Michael Cornwall, the well-known Wimpole Street bacteriologist, and he had been boys together at Uppingham. They were still acquaintances.

He came to the front door, and was about to ring the bell when the man he was looking for appeared round the side of the house, accompanied by an old man and a girl.

"Hailey—well I'm dashed!"

Dr. Cornwall advanced with outstretched hand. His deep, rather sinister eyes welcomed his colleague with an enthusiasm which was entirely unaffected. He introduced: "My uncle, Colonel Cornwall, and my cousin, Miss Patsy Cornwall, whom you must congratulate on having just become engaged," in his quick staccato manner.

"We're just going round the garden," he explained, "and you must accompany us. And, after that, to luncheon. Whereupon, my dear Hailey, if you have—as I feel you have—great business to discuss with me, we shall discuss it."

His bantering tones accorded well with his appearance, which had changed but little in the years. He was the same astute, moody, inordinately vain fellow who had earned for himself, once upon a time, the nickname of "The Lynx."

They strolled across the lawn, and came to a brick wall of that rich russet

hue which only time and the seasons can provide. Dr. Cornwall opened a door in the wall, and stood back for his companions to enter.

A sight of entrancing beauty greeted them, lines of fruit-trees in full blossom, as though the snows of some Alpine sunset had been spread, in all their glowing tints, on this English garden. Dr. Hailey, however, had no eyes for this loveliness. His gaze was fixed on a row of white-painted beehives which gleamed in the sunlight under the distant wall. Patsy Cornwall exclaimed in sheer wonder. Then a new cry of delight escaped her, as she detected, in a large greenhouse which flanked the wall, a magnificent display of scarlet tulips. She took Dr. Hailey, in whose eyes the melancholy expression seemed to have deepened, to inspect these, while her father and cousin strolled on up the garden path. She stood with him in the narrow gangway of the greenhouse, and feasted ecstatic eyes on the wonderful blossoms.

"Don't they make you wish to gather them all and take them away somewhere where there are no flowers?"

She turned to him, but he had sprung away from her side.

A cry, shrill and terrible, pierced the lazy silence of the morning. She saw her father and cousin fleeing back, pursued by an immense swarm of winged insects, towards the garden gate.

Blindly, frantically, they sought to ward off the dreadful onslaught. The old man stumbled, and would have fallen, had not his nephew caught him in his arms. She had a momentary glimpse of his face; it was as though she had looked on the face of Death.

"The bees!"

The words broke from Dr. Hailey's lips as a moan of despair. He had come to the closed door of the greenhouse, and seemed to be about to open it; but at the same moment one of the infuriated insects in delirious flight struck the glass pane beside him. Then another—and another—and another. He came reeling back towards the girl.

"Lie down on the gangway!" he shouted, at the highest pitch of his voice. "There may be a broken pane somewhere."

She turned her horror-stricken eyes to him.

"My father—oh, God!"

"Lie down for your life!"

He stood beside her, watching, ready to strike if one of the bees succeeded in entering the greenhouse. Only once did he remove his straining eyes from this task. The sight which then greeted them wrought a fresh cry of horror from his lips.

The terrible swarm hung like a dust-cloud in the air above the garden-gate, rising and falling in swift undulations, which caused the light to flash and scintillate on a myriad gilded bodies and shining wings. A faint, shrill piping came to his ears across the silence. The door in the wall was open, and the garden now quite empty.

. . . . . .

Biles leaned forward.

"Mrs. Bardwell's maid has confessed that she rang up Dr. Cornwall immediately before luncheon this morning," he said. "She tried to communicate with him before, but he had gone to the country, to a case, overnight. He got her warning that the police suspected him of being responsible for her mistress's death, just after he had carried his second victim, his uncle, in a dying condition, from the garden."

The detective struck a match, and relit his cigar. Dr. Hailey sat watching him with sorrowful eyes.

"Ten minutes later, as you know," he went on, "Cornwall blew his brains out. He had the wit to see that the game was up. He had been badly stung, of course, but his long experience of the bees made this a less serious matter than it would have been in the case of an ordinary outsider. In any case, moreover, he had to accept that risk if his plan was to succeed."

Silence fell in the big consulting-room. Then the doctor remarked:

"Miss Cornwall has recently become engaged to be married?"

"Yes." Biles drew a long whiff. "That was the circumstance which made speed essential to her cousin's murderous plan. He was hopelessly in debt, as a result of Mrs. Bardwell's extravagance. Only his uncle's money, which is considerable, would have saved him. If Miss Cornwall married he must have lost all hope of obtaining it, and so of marrying the girl on whom he had set his fickle heart. I have ascertained that he insisted on inoculating both father and daughter against spring catarrh a month ago, and that the injections he gave them hurt them terribly. No doubt Mrs. Bardwell received a similar injection about the same time. Thus, for each of these three individuals, a single bee-sting, on your showing, meant instant death."

Dr. Hailey inclined his head.

"The moment I saw the swarm, the truth flashed across my mind," he declared. "These Cyprian bees, as I have been at pains to find out, and as your bee-keeping friend told you, are exceedingly ill-natured. But no bees, unless they have been previously roused to frenzy, ever attack at sight people who have not even approached their hives. It was all too clear, even in that first terrible moment, that the swarm was part of a carefully prepared plan."

The detective rose, and held out his hand.

"But for you, my dear friend," he said, "Miss Cornwall must inevitably have shared her father's fate, and the most devilish murder of which I have ever so much as heard would, almost certainly, have gone unsuspected and unpunished."

F. Britten Austin

DIAMOND CUT DIAMOND

from The Strand Magazine, 1925

Permission to reprint is granted by the author and the Red Book Magazine

This will be the last cigar I shall smoke as a free man, Quayne," said Sir Humphrey Maule, quietly, as he reached for the matches.

Q. Q. raised his eyebrows.

"Going back into harness? I thought the Indian Government would be after you again. Moscow is getting far too much of a run for its money south of the Himalayas."

Our visitor was Sir Humphrey Maule, who had retired a few months back after a career in India that had remained unknown to the general public until a chorus of Press encomiums at its conclusion made it aware that yet another great servant of the Empire had finished his day's work. Head of a special branch of the Political Department, I remembered.

He sat now, big and impressive, in the chair by Q. Q.'s desk, lighting his cigar.

"No," he said. "I'm on my way to give myself up to the police."

Q. Q.'s quick glance challenged his seriousness.

"Income-tax returns—and a tender conscience?" He smiled quizzically at him.

Sir Humphrey finished his long puff of cigar-smoke.

"Murder." He sat back in his chair, grimly stolid.

I have rarely seen Q. Q. startled—but he was startled then—startled and instantaneously incredulous.

"You're joking, Maule?"

"Not in the least."

"My dear chap! *Murder?*" Q. Q. puzzled at him.

"Murder."

"But whom? Some would-be assassin?"

"Jimmy Loftus."

"Good God!"

"Yes—my best pal."

Q. Q. stared at him, frankly bewildered.

"*Jimmy Loftus!* But—in the name of everything—why?"

"I wish I knew."

"*How*—then?"

Sir Humphrey looked at him, spoke slowly and deliberately.

"I know—and yet I don't know."

The Chief's hand tapped in exasperation on his desk.

"You are talking in riddles, Maule."

"It is a riddle to me—the whole business. That's why I've come to you, Quayne. I did it—I must have done it—I somehow know I did it, can give you a story of the occurrence, although another part of me is, so to speak, loud in indignant denial—and the circumstantial evidence is beyond doubt. I don't envy my counsel his job of defending me. He hasn't a shred of a case. As an honest man, I should have to say I was guilty if I were asked. It's Jack Ketch for me all right. But—although I shouldn't dream for a moment of putting in the plea—I'd rather have a quick finish than a living death—I'd just like to know for my own personal satisfaction whether it oughtn't to be Broadmoor." He spoke with a grim succinctness, knocked off a little ash from his cigar, and looked straight at Q. Q. "You've solved some pretty queer mysteries, Quayne—we've solved some of them together—as a personal favour, the last probably I shall ask of you, I want you to solve this one for me. When Jack Ketch pulls the drop from under me, I want to go into the next world knowing *why* I did it."

"H'm! When and where do you say this occurrence happened?"

"In my rooms—last night."

"And where is—" Q. Q. hesitated, delicately, "Loftus—now?"

"In my sitting-room. Behind a locked door. I sent my man off for the day. He doesn't sleep on the premises, you know."

"H'm! No immediate hurry for the police, then. You ask me if you are sane. You appear sane enough to me. But any of us, given the circumstances, may develop hallucinations that have all the force of reality. You may be under a hallucination now. On what evidence do you think you killed Jimmy Loftus?"

Sir Humphrey smiled again, grimly.

"On the evidence of all my senses, Quayne. There is no hallucination about this. I woke up at seven o'clock this morning to find myself in my own sitting-room, still in my dress-clothes, and to see Jimmy Loftus, also in his evening kit, sitting crumpled in a chair with a bullet wound in his head. My own revolver was lying on the floor, one chamber recently discharged. I had a smear of burnt powder on the fingers of my right hand. More than that, I had suddenly an overpowering conviction—I had a queer vivid mental picture of the act, as though someone were calling it up in me—that I had myself shot him."

"Without a motive?" Q. Q. interjected the question.

"Without the slightest motive. Jimmy and I were the closest pals—the nearest thing I ever had to a brother. You can guess my horror at what I saw." Sir Humphrey's grim mouth clenched tight again for a moment. "The only explanation that I can give myself is that—although I've never had the slightest symptom of epilepsy—I did it in a sort of epileptic fit."

"H'm! If you had done it in an epileptic fit you would probably have remembered nothing at all about it when you woke up—and you *do* remember, you say?"

"Yes—in a queer sort of way. I remember it as one remembers a somnambulistic act performed in a dream—like something divorced from one's real self. Half of me protests violently that I did not, could not do it. Yet if I were challenged I could not help but say, with full conviction, automatically—ghastly and motiveless as the thing is—'Yes, I did it.' In fact, there's an immense and curious impulse in me—the usual murderer's impulse, I suppose—to rush out and proclaim the fact."

"That was why you were going to the police-station?"

Sir Humphrey shrugged his shoulders.

"You can't expect a man of my stamp to give himself the ignominy of dodging the police. There's the fact. I must take the consequences. I prefer to go halfway to meet them. It leaves me some personal dignity, at any rate."

"Why was Jimmy Loftus in your rooms last night?"

"We'd had a little dinner-party."

"A party? There were others, then?"

"Two. But they left soon after eleven."

"Who were they?"

"A Russian refugee aristocrat—Count Murovieff—and his daughter, Countess Stravinsky."

"Indeed!" Q. Q. leaned back in his chair, tapped his finger-tips together. "Let's have the whole yarn, Maule. Why did you have those three people to dinner last night? It must have been something important to have brought Loftus out."

Sir Humphrey paused to revive the glow of his cigar, to collect his thoughts for a commencement. "There's something in your guess about the Indian Government, Quayne. I *have* been approached—I'd more than half promised to go out again, in fact. Naturally, I began to sit up and take a little notice of things Indian again, to scrounge around for scraps of useful information. About ten days ago I met a couple of very interesting people—met them at my sister's house—this Count Murovieff and his daughter, regular *ancien régime*, red hot anti-Bolshie. It was the lady I got into conversation with first—fascinating creature, beautiful—and she did me the honour of knowing my name. A compliment rare enough to be appreciated." He smiled grimly. "She asked me if I were going back to India. I gave a non-committal sort of answer—as you know, I'm not the sort that unbosoms himself to casual ladies. And then I had a shock. 'Because if you are, Sir Humphrey,' she said, 'I can give you some information that will be of the greatest use to you. Would you like to put your finger on Tretiakeff?' You can guess I sat up pretty sharply and took quite a lot of notice at that. Only the very inner circles know even the name of Tretiakeff—a most elusive bird and the hidden manipulator of all the Soviet intrigues in India. At that moment her father came up—a white-haired, intellectual-looking little dwarf of a man, more like a professor than an aristocrat. She introduced us—and then my sister swooped down on us—mustn't have any interesting conversation

in her drawing-room, you know—against the usages of polite society—one has to 'mix'—that's her word—talk meaningless ape-chatter with the entire cageful."

He paused for another pull at his cigar. Q. Q. made no comment.

Sir Humphrey resumed.

"Anyway, they managed to give me an invitation to visit them at their flat in Mount Street. I went—the next day. And I got quite a lot of information—highly secret information which—as it happened to be already in our possession—I could check. They hated the Bolshie *régime* quite thoroughly, father and daughter alike—and no wonder, if their story was even half true. A story of torture, robbery, and murder of pretty near their entire family that would have been a gold nugget to a Riga special correspondent. I went several times, and each time I got something more—with a hint of something really big if—and they made this proviso—I were really going out to India again. Finally I put my cards on the table, told them I was. And then the rabbit came out of the hat. It seems the lady has a cousin—real name Baron Raschevsky, but known to the Communists as Stapouloff. To save his skin he took service under the Soviet Government—won their confidence—and is now second in command under Tretiakeff in India, at the very centre of all their underground intrigues. If they are to be believed, Mr. Stapouloff is consumed by an undying secret hatred of his employers and is only waiting for a chance to play them a thoroughly dirty trick—to blow the entire Soviet organization in India sky-high, in fact. The long and the short of it was that they promised to put me into touch with this very interesting gentleman."

Once more Sir Humphrey paused for a puff or two at his cigar.

"Of course, that isn't the kind of information that can be ignored," he went on. "I thought the best thing to do was to go and tell Loftus about it—it's down his street, as you know. I did so—and he was quite considerably interested. Naturally, he was very curious to meet my Russian friends. He asked me to invite them to dinner—and not to mention that he would be present."

"And last night was the dinner?" said Q. Q.

"Yes. We had a very pleasant evening. Of course, I had said nothing about Loftus coming along. He turned up about five minutes after they did, and he was the best of company—really brilliant—you know what he could be when he was in the mood. They all got on splendidly together."

"No sign of recognition on either side?"

Sir Humphrey shook his head.

"No. Not the least. Of course, I didn't get a chance to talk to Loftus."

"And then what happened?"

"At a little after eleven the Russians went away. I accompanied them downstairs, saw them into a taxi. I went up again to my rooms, where Loftus was sitting waiting for me—and then—that's the confoundedly queer part about it, Quayne—I can't really remember *with my whole self* what happened."

"Tell me what the part of yourself that remembers or seems to remember most has to say."

"I've got a sort of dream-knowledge—a conviction rather than a memory—of

having gone straight to the drawer of my desk where I keep a revolver, taken out the weapon, and deliberately shot Loftus—without any reason whatever—as he sat there in the chair. And then I can't remember anything at all, until I woke up this morning, found myself lying on the carpet, and saw Jimmy sitting there dead in the chair, with the revolver on the floor between me and him."

"And the other part of you—what does that remember?"

"Nothing at all. It's a blank from the time I saw those people disappearing down the street in their taxi—until the moment that I woke up this morning."

"H'm!" Q. Q. sat with closely-pressed lips. "What are your domestic arrangements, Maule?"

"It's a service-flat. The management sent up the dinner from the restaurant and did the waiting. Cleared up after we had finished, while we were in the sitting-room. They do all the work of the place, you know—except my sitting-room. I don't like unknown people messing about with my papers. My man does that."

"He doesn't sleep on the premises, you said. Was he there last night?"

"I let him off before ten o'clock—when he had brought in the whisky decanter and a couple of siphons. As I told you, I sent him off for the day directly he arrived at seven-thirty this morning. My sitting-room is just as it was last night, with poor Jimmy sitting in that chair—behind a locked door."

Q. Q. pondered for a moment.

"You say you saw your guests depart in their taxi. How did you get back into your rooms? Did you let yourself in with a key—or did you leave the door open?"

"I went up in the lift—by Jove, yes, it comes back to me now—I found my door shut, and when I felt for my bunch of keys I found I must have left them inside—I had to ring the bell."

"Who opened the door?"

"Jimmy, of course—yes, I remember that—besides, there was no one else in the flat."

"Was he quite normal?"

"Well, we'd had a good dinner—and one or two whiskies-and-sodas afterwards—and, yes, we were a bit cheerful, I suppose."

"And now can you remember anything else at all after Loftus let you into your rooms—apart from your dream-conviction that then or subsequently you shot him?"

Sir Humphrey shook his head.

"Nothing at all—other than that, it is a blank. But, I say, Quayne!" a sudden excitement came into his voice, "it's a funny thing about those keys! I could swear I hadn't got them in my pocket when I rang at that door—I remember ringing and ringing—Jimmy was slow in tumbling to what had happened—yet I certainly had them in my trouser-pocket when I woke up this morning. I remember turning them out quite normally with all my other things when I changed out of my dress-kit. Here they are." He fished out a bunch of keys from his pocket, held them up. "It's an action so automatic to shift them from

one kit to another that I hadn't given them a thought. But I certainly didn't have them last night—unless I was far more drunk than I thought."

"That, of course, is a possibility," said Q. Q., quietly. "I'd like to know a little more about these guests of yours. Can you describe the lady?"

"Tall, slim, raven-black hair, wonderful large grey eyes—beautiful as a goddess—gives you a thrill to look at her."

"H'm!" commented Q. Q. grimly; "enthusiasm is not a description. You were more definitely helpful about her father. Wait a moment." He got up, went across to a large cabinet index-file on the farther wall of the room, returned with a couple of "jackets." He sat down again, opened the dossiers, took out three or four photographs from each, spread them on his desk. "Are these your friends, Maule?"

Sir Humphrey looked at the photographs, uttered a sharp exclamation.

"By Jove, yes! Both of them!"

Q. Q. smiled in quiet satisfaction.

"I thought I was guessing right," he said. "But I am surprised that Loftus didn't tell you anything about those people when you rejoined him. He had a quite special interest in them both—and he certainly recognized them. The father's real name—he has, of course, many *aliases*—is Dr. Hugo Weidmann. He was at one time a well-known psycho-analyst in Vienna. Then he got into an unpleasant scandal, cleared out of Austria, and went into the German Secret Service, a line of business in which his professional experience was extremely useful. Over here, during the war, he posed as a Russian reformer who had fled from the Czarist police prior to 1914—and he brought off one or two really big *coups* before our people got on his track and he vanished into thin air."

"Good Lord!" exclaimed Sir Humphrey. "You're making me feel an awful fool, Quayne!"

"The daughter's name," continued Q. Q., imperturbably, "is Clara Weidmann—originally, that is to say; the names she has since given herself would fill a page of 'Who's Who.' She was certainly one of the most efficient spies we ever had to deal with. And she got clear away—but not before she had murdered, in very mysterious circumstances, one of Loftus's best men. Jimmy swore he would get her sooner or later—that was why, evidently, half-recognizing both from your description, he asked you to arrange a little *diner intime* so that he could put the matter beyond doubt. You, of course, serving in India all your life, would know nothing of either of them." He leaned back in his chair, fingertips together. "I'm beginning to see a little daylight in this, Maule."

"I'm damned if I am," replied Sir Humphrey. "With all that. Who are these people working for now?"

"For the Soviet Government, evidently. They knew or guessed that you might be going back to India. You're a formidable adversary, Maule—on your own ground. They did the clever thing—nobbled you from the start. If you had taken all their information seriously—naturally they saw to it that all you could check should be genuine—and had put yourself in the hands of Mr. Stapouloff, you'd have got yourself into a pretty mess."

"Well, that's out of the question now, anyway. I don't go to India—I go to the Old Bailey and to a nasty little ceremony in a prison-yard early one morning. For there's no doubt about it—mad or not—I shot poor Loftus."

Q. Q. looked at him.

"Doesn't it occur to you, Maule, how extremely convenient it is to these two people that Loftus—they certainly recognized him, as he recognized them—should be dead, and you completely out of the way?"

"Yes—but—" Sir Humphrey frowned in a desperation of thought. "It can't be more than a coincidence. I saw them go—I'm certain of that. How could they have got back, killed Loftus, and—this is the vital point—given me the conviction that I had done it myself? *How could they?*"

"That, Maule," said Q. Q., caressing his chin, "we're going to try to find out."

Sir Humphrey leaned forward in a sudden hypothesis.

"They couldn't have drugged me—*made* me murder Jimmy, could they?" he asked, desperately. "It wouldn't go down with a jury, I know, but it means a lot to *me*. It isn't possible—just wildly possible—is it? Queer things happen in India, you know."

Q. Q. shrugged his shoulders.

"They are very clever people," he said, as he took a sheet of note-paper and commenced to write. He wrote only a few quick words, folded the paper, reached for an envelope, put in the note, stuck it down, and addressed it. "What number in Mount Street?" Sir Humphrey told him. He added it, looked across to me. "A little job for you, Mr. Creighton. Take this note to the Countess Stravinsky and give it to her personally." He glanced at his watch. "It is now just eleven o'clock. You will probably find her at home. She may have something to say to you. Stay and listen to it—stay just as long as she likes to keep you—make the lady's acquaintance, in fact." He smiled at me. "But when you do leave, rejoin us at Sir Humphrey's rooms. Give him the address, Maule."

Sir Humphrey gave me his card, and a few minutes later I was in a taxi speeding towards Mount Street.

A prim, foreign-looking maid led me into a large drawing-room, furnished with an exotic and bizarre luxury, a room of rich Chinese blues touched with vivid greens, where gilt Buddhas and grotesque Hindu gods niched themselves against a simplicity of wall.

"Vait 'ere," said the maid. "I vill tell ze Countess."

I stood there, feeling my heart thump, and waited. And I craved for my automatic, so thoughtlessly left behind. The atmosphere of that room seemed pregnant with something mysteriously sinister. What drama was going to be precipitated by the sealed thin note I fingered?

I turned from an absent-minded stare at a squat white-jade Chinese idol to see the Countess standing in the room, the door-curtain just falling behind her.

She was beautiful—beautiful, I can only reiterate the word—with such a purity of beauty, such a grave perfection of Madonna-like loveliness, that her presence set me quivering in a surge of awe that overwhelmed the cynicism of reason.

Her large, clear grey eyes—wonderful under the raven-black hair, smoothed with the slightest ripple back from her brows—rested upon me in mute inquiry.

"The Countess Stravinsky?" I said.

"Yes." Her voice, in the utterance of that one syllable, was surprisingly musical on a rich, deep, vibrant note.

I held out the envelope.

She took it, tore it open, read the missive. I saw a sudden hardness come into her beautiful face. Once more the wonderful grey eyes were resting on me.

"You know what is in this note?"

"No, madame."

The hardness vanished from her face—vanished so that a moment later one could not recall what it had been. She smiled—a sudden opening of dazzling fascination.

"You are a——" she hesitated, "an *employé* of Mr. Quentin Quayne?"

I had no cue for my answer. I risked the truth.

"Yes, madame."

Her eyes ranged over me, summed me up.

"You seem to be a gentleman," she said.

I bowed.

"Were you told to bring back an answer to this?" She indicated the sheet of paper in her hand.

"I was told merely to hand it to you personally, madame." Confound Q. Q.! Why the devil hadn't he told me what was in that letter? I should have had at least some idea of what to do or say.

The large grey eyes rested on me again. She pondered something I could not guess at. Then again she smiled.

"Will you not sit down, Mr.—Mr.——?" she finished on a note of interrogation.

"Creighton," I said.

I took the soft armchair to which she gestured. She sat down opposite me on a settee. Our eyes met. A part of me reminded me insistently that she was a spy, a murderess. Another part of me, deep down, elemental, blindly instinctive, rose in revolt against an accusation that seemed patently absurd. Q. Q.—Sir Humphrey—both might have been mistaken. Photographs are the most deceptive of evidence. These thoughts flashed through me in a matter of seconds. She was pondering again—pondering, perhaps, what was required of her. What *was* required of her? What the devil was in that note?

Suddenly she smiled once more, stretched out her slim white arm to a cigarette-box on a little table, held it out to me.

"Will you smoke, Mr. Creighton?" she asked, in that rich, deep voice.

I accepted. She took one herself, reached for the matches, struck a light, held it to my cigarette—her large grey eyes close to mine evoked a peculiar intimate start deep down in me, a sudden surge and tumult of blood, over which I set my teeth—lit her own. She dropped the still-lighted match into an antique bronze tripod brazier—Chinese and grotesque—which stood close to my right hand.

"You are going straight back to Mr. Quayne when you leave here?"

"Yes, madame."

"You are not in a hurry?"

"No, madame."

A quick look came from those clear grey eyes, large under the raven-black hair, a look that shot through me like a searchlight. It was instantly veiled, replaced by a smile that was languorously serene.

I sat, my heart thumping, waiting for her next words. I heard the faint ticking of a clock across the room. And, as I waited, I became gradually conscious of a subtle incense-like perfume filling the atmosphere, a diffusion of cloying aromatic sweetness, semi-pungent to my nostrils, that made me automatically take a deep breath. It filled my lungs, seemed to mount to my head. I pulled myself out of a momentary dizziness, glanced round at the brazier into which she had thrown her match. A slender stem of grey smoke ascended from the bowl, coiled into a lazy spiral at its summit. Was this some sinister trick? No!—impossible!—fantastic! My suspicions were running away with me. Yet I dared not—dumb in the awe she inspired in me—break her silence. She remained immobile, lost in thoughts, her face a miracle of calm beauty.

I resigned myself. That slender stem of grey smoke continued to ascend, and with that subtly pervasive aromatic odour I inhaled at every breath, a numbness in myself—imperceptible at first—crept over me. My brain dulled. I relaxed, luxuriously, languorously, carelessly scornful of the vigilant alertness to which a moment before I had endeavoured to hold fast. I lost the clear sense of my identity. And in place of my normal self, obscure primitive impulses stirred in me. They frightened me. I found myself yearning for a mad kiss from that exquisite mouth. My arms ached to enfold that lithe slender figure, to crush it frenziedly in an embrace that would enforce reciprocation. My brain whirled at the thought of it—it seemed that the next moment I should spring forward, hot-breathed upon her—flung from my seat by an impulse beyond civilized volition. Yet I did not move. I felt something hurt the fingers of my right hand on my knee. It was my cigarette, forgotten, which had burnt down to them. With an immense muscular effort I tossed the stump into the brazier whence the grey smoke ascended. In that last flicker of normal consciousness, I glanced at the watch upon my wrist. To my surprise, it marked only half-past eleven.

The silence had lasted a time beyond my computation. She turned her large clear eyes upon me, smiled. I perceived her with a vision that was blurred, heard her—deep-toned, thrillingly sonorous—with a dizzy brain.

"You are thinking things about me—unpleasant things?"

"Madame—I—I—" My own voice sounded strange to me.

She leaned forward, exquisitely seductive. Again I felt that primitive reckless urge, almost irresistible, electric, spontaneous, in every fibre of me, repressed it with a last spasm of will.

"I want you to look in my eyes—and see if you can believe them."

The eyes came close, wide open, eyes of a strange clear grey, the pupils peculiarly fascinating, seeking mine.

"Madame—I—I—" That direct gaze was insupportable. I dropped my own—gasped in suffocation, my brain in a dizzy whirl.

"Look! Keep on looking!"

I looked into those eyes that focused themselves on mine—looked—kept on looking—saw nothing but those eyes—looked into them for an endless time where I lost perception of all else but those two clear grey eyes holding mine until I could no longer turn away my gaze. My arm jerked of itself—went stiff. An immense fatigue weighed heavy on my shoulders.

"*Lean back!*" A last flicker of resistance leaped up in me. "No! no!—I—I mustn't." "Lean back!" I ceded, relaxed, felt suddenly comfortable.

It might have been æons after, I saw, mistily, vaguely, as through my eyelashes, the Countess standing tall above me. By her side was a sharp-faced, white-haired, intellectual-looking little dwarf of a man, peering eagerly at me.

"Yes—I think so." Her voice came through—through cotton wool—to my dulled senses. I could not move—had no will to move. I leaned back, locked in a complete passivity I accepted with a last tiny fragment of my consciousness.

"Answer me, Mr. Creighton."

"Yes." I heard myself answer—a voice that was far away from me—a voice that spoke with surprising (only I had lost the capacity for surprise) promptness of obedience.

And then—and then—I remember nothing more, until—I cannot say to this day how—I found myself in a taxi, speeding through the London traffic, and knowing quite clearly that I was on my way to Q. Q. at Sir Humphrey Maule's rooms. What had happened in that flat? How did I get into that taxi? I could not remember. I could only remember, very clearly, that I was on my way to Q. Q.—that I *must* get to Q. Q.—for a reason still obscure to me—with the minimum of delay. And then another alarm shot into my mind. Was I really going to Sir Humphrey's flat—or was the taxi-driver taking me, under sinister orders, to some other destination? I had not the least recollection of giving him the address. I had scarce grappled with this sudden panic when the cab stopped, in the quiet street off St. James's where Sir Humphrey lived, at the number given on the card I took, for verification, from my pocket. I got out.

"Who gave you this address?" I asked.

The taxi-driver stared at me.

"You did, sir," he said.

I hurried into the building, cursing at the exhibition I had made of myself. The lift shot me up to the floor occupied by Sir Humphrey. I rang. Sir Humphrey himself opened the door.

I followed him along a short passage, into an unfamiliar sitting-room adorned with Indian trophies. A white sheet was thrown over something shapeless in a chair near the table. In another chair, near a writing-desk, Q. Q. was sitting. He smiled at me.

I stopped. What was it I had to do when I saw Q. Q.? What was the obscure impulse which surged up in me, which made my fingers work nervously of them-

selves? A cloud was over my brain. I felt my muscles go spontaneously rigid. Q. Q. still smiled.

"A knife, Mr. Creighton?" he said, blandly—held out an ivory paper-knife.

I took it automatically, felt my fingers clench tightly over it without my volition—and then, as though a trigger were pulled inside me that discharged a sudden nervous force, with no clear consciousness of what I was doing, but under an impulse that filled me suddenly to the exclusion of all else, I sprang at him, stabbed straight at his chest with the paper-knife. And even as I delivered the blow, I had an obscure half-knowledge that it was all right, that it was only harmless make-believe—a complaisance that reconciled conflicting compulsions.

Sir Humphrey leaped forward with a startled cry, clutched my wrist.

Q. Q. smiled. He had sat motionless without a tremor.

"Let him go. The wrong knife, Mr. Creighton. Give him that Indian dagger, Maule."

Sir Humphrey hesitated.

"Give it to him."

He obeyed. With obvious reluctance he handed me an Indian dagger in place of the paper-knife he had wrenched from my grasp. I stood quivering, in a peculiar suspension of thought, of all volition. It was as though I was under a spell.

"Obey the command given you, Mr. Creighton," said Q. Q., quietly.

At the words once more I sprang—and as I did so I realized with an overwhelming shock what it was I had in my hand, what it was I had been commanded to do—*murder!—murder* Q. Q.! That realization checked me like a bullet striking me in mid-course. In an immense revulsion of all myself, a violent, spontaneous, shattering recoil from the atrocity I was about to commit, I stopped dead, flung the dagger from me. My brain suddenly cleared. I stood trembling, dazed, bewildered, ready to drop with humiliation. Good God! What would Q. Q. think of me? I could have burst into hysterical tears.

"My God, sir!" I stammered. "What—what's the matter with me? Am I mad? —or—or——?" I had no explanation to offer, even to myself. The lack of it terrified me. I looked at that dagger lying on the floor, and felt suddenly physically sick. I swayed on my feet.

Q. Q. rose quietly from his chair, put his hand on my shoulder.

"All right, Mr. Creighton." His eyes looked into mine, sent reassurance into me, braced me to command of myself. "You've been making yourself useful for once—that's all." He smiled. "Sit down in that chair—and pull yourself together." Once more his eyes looked straight, compellingly, into mine. "You are quite normal again—*quite*—you understand that?"

"Yes, sir," I gasped, and subsided weakly into the chair.

"Well, Maule, do you see the point of that little experiment?"

"I'm damned if I do!" Sir Humphrey looked utterly mystified.

"Then I'll tell you. I sent Mr. Creighton round to your lady-friend of last night—she's the more dangerous of the pair—with a note he was instructed to

deliver only into the Countess Stravinsky's own hand. I've no doubt he did so. That note was as follows"—Q. Q. smiled grimly as he paused—" 'On behalf of Mr. James Loftus, Mr. Quentin Quayne presents his compliments to Fräulein Clara Weidmann.' Rather a shock to the lady, I'm afraid." He smiled again. "Now do you begin to see?"

"Not in the least."

Q. Q. turned to me.

"What happened in the flat at Mount Street, Mr. Creighton?"

I tried with all my might to remember—found myself baffled with an absolute blankness. It exasperated me, humiliated me anew.

"I—I'm sorry, sir," I stammered. "I don't know what's the matter with me—I can't remember anything about it."

Q. Q. nodded. His voice was kindly as he spoke.

"Never mind. I can guess." He turned again to Sir Humphrey. "Put yourself in the lady's place. Last night she meets Jimmy Loftus, realizes that she is recognized, and eliminates him very cleverly. This morning she learns not only that Quentin Quayne is aware of her identity, but that Quentin Quayne holds her responsible for Loftus's death. Obviously, Quentin Quayne also must be eliminated at once. How is she to do it? One method, at least, particularly after last night, would instantly suggest itself to her—a temptation I dangled in front of her, in fact. You will remember that I carefully told Mr. Creighton not to hurry away. I put an opportunity into her hands."

"Opportunity?" queried Sir Humphrey, still puzzled.

"Hypnosis," said Q. Q., succinctly. "You forget her father was professor of psychiatry in Vienna—and she was an apt pupil. She undoubtedly hypnotized Creighton, and gave him the post-hypnotic suggestion, with the safeguard that his memory should be an absolute blank on the matter, that he should stab me directly he saw me. I noticed his fingers working the moment he came into the room. You saw for yourself what happened."

"Good God" groaned Sir Humphrey, in a sudden anguish. "And they must have hypnotized *me* also!—made me kill poor Jimmy! I really did it, then! That proves it!"

"It proves nothing of the sort. It proves just the opposite. One of my reasons for making this somewhat dangerous experiment was to establish beyond doubt whether it is or is not possible to hypnotize a subject into committing a genuine murder. It is easy enough to make him act a dummy one—but it is a hotly-disputed point whether he will or will not obey a suggestion to do the real thing. Your lady-friend was doubtless quite aware of this—but the case was urgent with her—she had to take a long chance if she was to do anything at all. She took it—after all, the possibility has never been definitely disproved. And I took a chance that, being quite ready for him, I might be quicker than Mr. Creighton if he meant business with a real knife in his hand. You saw the difference in his behaviour when he had the paper-knife and when he had the real thing. No, Maule," he concluded, decisively, "my experiment proved beyond doubt that whatever hypnotic suggestion was given you last night—your

drinks were drugged, of course—you did *not* murder Jimmy Loftus. If the thing can be done at all it could be done with Creighton. She tried. It can *not* be done."

Sir Humphrey mopped his brow.

"You're sure?"

"Quite sure!"

The big man stared at him.

"Thank God!" he ejaculated. "But how do you account for my instinctive conviction that I *did* do it?"

Q. Q. smiled.

"It is quite easy under hypnosis to make a man wake up with the belief that he has committed a murder—especially if you arrange the circumstantial evidence convincingly. May I use your telephone?"

"Yes—yes—of course." Sir Humphrey was still bewildered. "What are you going to do?"

"I'm going to get your friends round here. Very clever people"—Q. Q. smiled again as he picked up the telephone—"but I think they'll find this is a case of diamond cut diamond. Hallo! Are you there?" He gave a number, waited. "Hallo! Is that Sebright? Oh, Sebright, a murder was committed last night at Sir Humphrey Maule's flat—yes, St. James's—I'll give you the details presently. Yes—I want you to come round—but on your way I want you to call at No. 504 Mount Street and bring along a couple of Russian people, Count Murovieff and his daughter, the Countess Stravinsky. Listen—and I'll explain. These two people were guests of Sir Humphrey Maule last night. They left soon after eleven. The murder was committed after that hour. Precisely. They have an alibi. Now, I want you to explain to them that their presence is necessary to verify whether the room is or is not as they left it at eleven. You can tell them, if you like, that the murderer is known. I think you'll have no difficulty in persuading them to come along—they cannot refuse their assistance in elucidating the circumstances of the crime. But it is most important that they should accompany you—and, by the way, don't mention my name. Good. You'll find me in Sir Humphrey's flat expecting you."

He hung up the receiver, turned to us with a smile. "Now we'll soon clear up all this little business."

Sir Humphrey had been pacing up and down the room. He swung round to Q. Q.

"I'm still bewildered, Quayne. What really happened in this room last night?"

Q. Q. smiled at him.

"You've heard of dhatura, Maule?"

"Of course I have. Favourite drug of the Indian criminal. Seeds rather like capsicum. Usually administered chopped up. Leaves no trace in the human body. Sends the victim into insensibility, and if he doesn't die he wakes up minus his memory—can't remember a thing about it."

"Precisely. Your two pseudo-Russian friends are, however, a little more refined

in their methods than the ordinary Indian criminal. They didn't want the police to find you and Loftus lying dead here, and they themselves naturally under suspicion. They wanted Loftus dead and you self-accused of the murder. So they put into your whiskies-and-sodas a little—not crude dhatura, but a scientific preparation of the drug which is considerably more subtle in its effects—it leaves the victim extremely susceptible to hypnotic influence at the same time that it embroils his memory and paralyses him into a semi-insensible immobility. A drop or two would suffice, and it would take about ten minutes to have its effect. They did this just before they left. You accompanied them downstairs. On the way they picked your pocket of your keys. You came back, found the door shut, and—you remember—it was some little time before you could get Loftus to open it. The drug was already working in him, of course. You thought that both he and you had had a little too much to drink. You both went back into the sitting-room—not very steadily, I expect—and sat down. *You were both sitting there quite helpless,* when at a time convenient to your departed friends—perhaps two hours later, when everybody in the place had gone to bed—they returned, let themselves in at the outer door, and then this door with your keys, and found you nicely ready for them."

"Good God!" exclaimed Sir Humphrey. "And then——?"

"And then they hunted for your revolver, found it, shot Loftus as he sat paralysed in his chair, put the revolver on the floor after smearing your finger with the burnt powder which had escaped from its not very closely-fitting barrel, put the keys back in your pocket and gave you a detailed hypnotic suggestion that you had done the whole business yourself, that you would sleep till the morning, and wake up with such a full conviction of your guilt that you would surrender yourself to the police. Very neat, I think."

"*Phew!*" Sir Humphrey whistled. He was still only half-convinced, however, and showed it. "All this is damned difficult to prove in a court of law, Quayne. What do you propose to do when you get these people here?"

Q. Q. smiled again.

"I told you this was a case of diamond cut diamond. You'll see. They should be here in a minute or two now."

We sat and waited, we three—and that sheeted something in the armchair, which, in my state of broken nerve, I was grateful not to see uncovered. The minutes dragged. The ringing of the door-bell—when it came—was almost a relief.

"You go, Maule," said Q. Q.

Sir Humphrey went to open to the new arrivals. Q. Q. turned to the chair by the table, carefully withdrew that shapelessly humped covering, revealed a good-looking man crumpled in the seat, his head forward on his chest, dried blood plastered on his face from a wound in the temple. I gripped myself in a sudden sickening, sat short-breathed in suspense.

The next moment Sir Humphrey was again at the door, speaking to those who followed him.

"In here," he said. He made way politely for the lady.

She entered. I can't describe what sprang up in me at the sight once more

of that quiet, Madonna-like beauty. Behind her was the little, intellectual-faced, white-headed dwarf of a man. And behind him was Sebright.

She took a step or two into the room, saw the corpse in the chair, and then her eyes switched to Q. Q. standing impassively close to it—from Q. Q. to me, fascinated where I sat. She must have recognized him as she recognized me—recognized also, in a flash, that her plan had failed. Q. Q. was still alive—grimly smiling.

She swayed, went deathly pale, jerked out her hand for support at the table.

The little white-haired old man sprang forward, caught her in his arms.

"Poor lady! Too much of a shock to her seeing that in the chair, Quayne," said Sebright, with reproof in his voice.

But Q. Q. ignored him. He also had sprung forward, caught at the lady, seemed to be mixed up in almost a struggle with the little man as he took her into his own stronger arms.

"All right," he said. "Let me have her. She'll be all right in a minute. Brandy, Maule."

He deposited her carefully in an armchair, turned to take the brandy-decanter Sir Humphrey held out to him.

"A glass?" Q. Q.'s eyes ranged round the room. "Ah, there's one!" He went across to a side-table, poured out a stiff peg of brandy, took it back to the woman. She waved it away. "I insist!" he said, firmly but not unkindly, held it to her mouth, poured some, whether she willed or no, down her throat. She gasped and choked with it.

Sir Humphrey was explaining to Sebright what he knew of the crime.

"I woke up at seven o'clock this morning in this room to—to see that!" he said, gesturing to the corpse in the chair.

"Good God!" exclaimed Sebright. "*Loftus!* But who could have done it?"

"I did!"

I jumped with the surprise of it. It was Sir Humphrey who had spoken—automatically—with full conviction.

Sebright also had jumped.

"*You?*" he cried. "*You,* Sir Humphrey?"

Sir Humphrey stood confused.

"I—I really don't know why I said that!" he stammered. "It—it was like something saying it for me."

Sebright gave him a glance of keen suspicion. Q. Q. interposed.

"All right, Sebright. He didn't mean it. He didn't do it. You'll understand presently."

Sebright looked altogether unconvinced. He turned to the little white-haired man.

"You left Sir Humphrey alone with Mr. Loftus last night, I understand, Count?" he said, professionally sharp-voiced.

"Yes. At five minutes past eleven. Sir Humphrey accompanied us to the street, put us in a taxi. Is not that so, Sir Humphrey?" The little old man was suave, pleasantly soft in his tones—a little nervous, however, for he took a white silk

handkerchief from his pocket, wiped his mouth in a finically dandified gesture.

"Yes," said Sir Humphrey. I saw the sweat pouring on his forehead. "Yes—that's quite right."

"No one else was in the flat, apparently," continued Sebright, severely. "Your position requires a considerable amount of explanation, Sir Humphrey."

Sir Humphrey stammered.

"I–I—" He looked helplessly towards Q. Q.

At that moment I uttered a startled cry. A peculiar expression had come over the face of the beautiful woman in the chair. She leaned back limply, stared in front of her with eyes that one guessed saw nothing—seemed as if in a trance.

The little white-haired old man jumped forward again. Q. Q. restrained him.

"All right, Count. Please do not interfere. This is a most fortunate little accident, I think." He smiled pleasantly as he quietly pushed the little old man back. "I had an intuition from the moment I saw your daughter that she was clairvoyant. As you see, she has gone into a trance—quite harmless—overcome perhaps by the sinister influences with which this room must still be soaked. Let us avail ourselves of it—in the interests of justice." He smiled again. "Your daughter will perhaps be able to show us precisely what happened in this room last night."

A frightened look had come into the little old man's eyes.

"I–I protest!" he said, sharply, making an effort to assert a personal dignity. "I protest against your trying possibly dangerous and certainly quite illegal experiments with my daughter!"

Q. Q. smiled at him.

"I am afraid, with all due apology, that I must ignore your protests, Count. A murder was committed in this room last night by very clever and quite unscrupulous people. We cannot afford a too scrupulous legality in dealing with them. A case of diamond cut diamond, in fact." He smiled again, turned to Sebright. His manner suddenly changed. "Will you please see that this man does not interfere, Sebright? I give him formally into your charge as Dr. Hugo Weidmann, against whom there is a warrant as accessory to the murder of Henry Paulin, Mr. Loftus's chief assistant, in January, 1917."

"It's false!" screamed the little man.

"It is true," replied Q. Q., imperturbably. "Quick, Sebright! Hold him—before he tries any tricks!—and gag him if he begins to utter a word!"

Sebright, after one quick stare of amazement, leaped to the emergency. In a moment he was by the side of the white-faced little old man, held him fast.

"And now," continued Q .Q., with a grimly bland smile, "we will proceed with the experiment." He turned to Sir Humphrey. "Pull up the chair from which you found this morning you had fallen, Maule, into precisely the position of last night. Sit down in it and do not move. You were drugged, remember. Behave as if you were still drugged."

Sir Humphrey did as he was told, pulled up the chair, sat down in it, facing that dead body gruesomely motionless at the end of the table. His blanched

countenance looked almost drugged, in fact, in the tension of the moment.

Q. Q. reverted to the lady. He lifted her hand. It lay limp in his.

"Fräulein Clara Weidmann!" he said, in a voice of quiet authority. "You will respond to my commands, and to my commands only! Look into my eyes!"

The woman sighed. She moved her head slightly, looked into Q. Q.'s eyes, remained looking into them without a blink.

Q. Q. went on:—

"You will hear my voice when I speak to you, and only when I speak to you. You will hear no one else. You will see no one in this room except Sir Humphrey Maule and Mr. Loftus. Any other individuals will make no impression whatever on your consciousness. It will seem to you that they are not present. Last night you and your father left these rooms soon after eleven o'clock. It will seem to you that you are back at that hour, that you are living over again whatever happened after it." He turned to Sebright. "You will note, Sebright, that I am giving the lady no specific suggestions of what *did* happen."

The little old man wriggled half-out of Sebright's grasp.

"Clara!" he cried, gaspingly. "Clara! Listen to my voice! Clara! *You will obey me—me only!*"

"Gag him, Sebright!" said Q. Q. Sebright clapped a big hand over the man's mouth.

The woman in the chair, however, seemed not to have heard his voice. She remained immobile.

"Now, then. Fräulein Weidmann—*stand up!*" Q. Q. spoke quietly, but authoritatively.

She stood up.

"You have said 'Good night,' to Sir Humphrey and Mr. Loftus. Where are you?"

"In the taxi." She spoke in a far-away but distinct voice. "I cannot stand in it."

"Sit down, then." She sat on the arm of the chair. "Talk as you talked then."

"*Du hast die Schlüssel?*" The words came automatically, spontaneously, a look of eager cunning suddenly vivid in her beautiful face. "*Famos!*" She gabbled quick German I could not catch. "*Ja—ja. Zwei Stunden—ja—sicher!*"

"Two hours," said Q. Q. "Those two hours have now passed. It is a quarter-past one. Where are you now?"

"Here." She stood up, like one in a trance.

"How did you get here?"

"We let ourselves in with the keys we took from Sir Humphrey's pocket." She spoke like one who answers questions in her sleep.

"You are living through that experience again. It *is*, to your consciousness, a quarter-past one. Where did you stand when the clock marked that hour?"

"We were just coming in the door."

Q. Q. led her—almost pathetically somnambulistic—to the door, released her.

"Behave just as you did then. It is real to you—the experience all over again."

Once more she came suddenly to an uncannily vivid life. She crept forward stealthily from the door, turned to glance over her shoulder as at someone following her, made a beckoning gesture. She whispered swift foreign words—I caught the German for "Yes, yes. Helpless—both of them. Quick!"

Q. Q. and I stood back with Sebright and his still silently struggling prisoner, left the centre of the room clear save for the two figures of Loftus and Sir Humphrey sitting motionless in their chairs. We watched her come across the room, as though watching a drama on the stage.

She went to the writing-desk, pulled open first one drawer and then another in a hurried search for something, uttered a little low cry of satisfaction, turned from it. In her hand was a revolver, Sir Humphrey's own revolver (Q. Q., I remembered, had carefully inquired after its normal resting place, put it back during the time we waited). She held it out to someone invisible.

"Here it is!" she said, in rapid, low-voiced German, her whole being keyed to a breathless tension. "Quick! You do it!"

She released her hold upon the weapon and it dropped upon the floor. But to her it must have seemed that the invisible person had taken it. She gave a little involuntary jump—uncannily dramatic in that silence—as though at a detonation.

"*Gott!*" she whispered, in German. "What a noise!" Then she sprang towards that collapsed figure of Loftus in his chair, peered at it closely, nodded her head quickly in reassurance. "*Tot!*"

She looked round, looked at Sir Humphrey, his eyes staring and breathing deeply as he sat in his chair. She went across to him, took up his hand, spoke in English.

"You hear me?" she said, sharply.

"Yes." Sir Humphrey gasped as he looked at her.

"Look into my eyes!"

He looked, kept staring at them for a minute or two of silence in which she fixed her gaze on his.

"When you wake up you will *know* that you killed your friend Loftus. I tell you how it happened. After putting us in the taxi, you came back here, went straight to your desk, took out your revolver, and shot him where he sat. You will not wake until seven o'clock. You will remember nothing about us except seeing our taxi go away down the street. But you will be so sure that you shot Loftus that you will give yourself up to the police to-morrow morning, and whenever the crime is mentioned you will accuse yourself. You understand?"

"Yes." Sir Humphrey's voice came from far away.

"Good God!" exclaimed Sebright.

Fascinated by the drama he was watching, he must for the moment have relaxed his grasp upon his prisoner. I saw the little man wriggle—and the next moment there was a deafening detonation, a faint film of smoke. The woman staggered, went headlong to the floor.

Q. Q. jumped to her, twisted her over, shook his head.

"Through the heart," he said.

I turned with him, to look at the little old man from whom, at that moment, Sebright was wrenching a small automatic pistol. Dr. Hugo Weidmann snarled at us.

"Better for her than your English law," he said. He relapsed suddenly into cool cynicism. "All right, Mr. Quayne. You've won. We did it. But before I go with this gentleman," he jerked his head towards Sebright, "I'd like to know—professionally—what spell you put on my daughter."

Q. Q. smiled at him.

"Simple, my dear sir. When we were both assisting her in her sudden and not unnatural faintness, I picked your pocket of the little phial I guessed you carried there for emergencies"—he held it up—"the stuff with which you drugged Loftus and Maule last night. And I gave her a good stiff dose of it in her brandy. As I have already remarked—diamond cut diamond, eh?" He ignored the little old man's savage curse, turned to Sir Humphrey, sitting there strangely stiff in his chair, shook him by the shoulder. "Wake up, Maule!" he said, jocularly. "Seven o'clock!"

Sir Humphrey stirred, looked about him, jumped up with a sudden horror on his features. His eyes met Sebright's.

"All right, Sir Humphrey," said Sebright. "We know now who killed poor Mr. Loftus."

Sir Humphrey stood like one dazed.

"Yes," he said. "God forgive me—I did—I know I did! Though I don't know why! Take me in charge!"

We all stared.

"Good Lord!" said Q. Q. "I believe she's hypnotized him again!"

Sebright looked not only bewildered but bad-tempered.

"All this," he grumbled, "is going to sound fantastic in a court of law, Quayne."

"Never mind, Inspector," said a gasping, croaking voice, "it won't come to a court of law." It was the little old man who spoke. His face was livid, dreadful, with foam at the corners of his mouth. "When I first came in—saw Quayne—I—I guessed—it was—hands up. Took—precautions——" he grinned horribly, "little glass capsule—held in mouth—too—too clever for you——" He wilted suddenly in Sebright's strong grasp—went down, lifeless, upon the floor when that grasp was released.

Raymund Allen

A HAPPY SOLUTION

from The Strand Magazine, 1916

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The portmanteau, which to Kenneth Dale's strong arm had been little more than a feather-weight on leaving the station, seemed to have grown heavier by magic in the course of the half-mile that brought him to Lord Churt's country house. He put the portmanteau down in the porch with a sense of relief to his cramped arm, and rang the bell.

He had to wait for a few minutes, and then Lord Churt opened the door in person. His round, rubicund face, that would hardly have required any make-up to present an excellent "Mr. Pickwick," beamed a welcome. "Come in, my dear boy, come in. I'm delighted to see you. I wish you a merry Christmas."

It was Christmas Eve, and his manner was bubbling over with the kindliness appropriate to the season. He seized the portmanteau and carried it into the hall.

"I am my own footman and parlour-maid and everything else for the moment. Packed all the servants off to a Christmas entertainment at the village school and locked the doors after 'em. My wife's gone, too, and Aunt Blaxter."

"And Norah?" Kenneth inquired.

"Ah! Norah!" Churt answered, with a friendly clap on Kenneth's shoulder. "Norah's the only person that really matters, of course she is, and quite right too. Norah stayed in to send off a lot of Christmas cards, and I fancy she is still in her room, but she must have disposed of the cards, because they are in the letter-bag. She would have been on the look-out for you, no doubt, but your letter said you were not coming."

"Yes, I know. I thought I couldn't get away, but to-day my chief's heart was softened, and he said he would manage to do without me till the day after to-morrow. So I made a rush for the two-fifteen, and just caught it."

"And here you are as a happy surprise for your poor, disappointed Norah—and for us all," he added, genially.

"I hope you approve of my *fiancée*," Kenneth remarked, with a smile that expressed confidence as to the answer.

"My dear Kenneth," Churt replied, "I can say with sincerity that I think her both beautiful and charming. We were very glad to ask her here, and her singing is a great pleasure to us." He hesitated for a moment before continuing. "You must forgive us cautious old people if we think the engagement just a little bit precipitate. As Aunt Blaxter was saying to-day, you can't really know her very

well on such a short acquaintance, and you know nothing at all of her people."

Kenneth mentally cursed Aunt Blaxter for a vinegar-blooded old killjoy, but did not express any part of the sentiment aloud.

"We must have another talk about your great affair later," Churt went on. "Now come along to the library. I am just finishing a game of chess with Sir James Winslade, and then we'll go and find where Miss Norah is hiding."

He stopped at a table in the passage that led from the hall to the library, and took a bunch of keys out of his pocket. "She was sending you a letter, so there can be no harm in our rescuing it out of the bag." He unlocked the private letter-bag and turned out a pile of letters on to the table, muttering an occasional comment as he put them back, one by one, in the bag, in his search for the letter he was looking for. "Aunt Emma—ah, I ought to have written to her too; must write for her birthday instead. Mrs. Dunn—same thing there, I'm afraid. Red Cross—hope that won't get lost; grand work, the Red Cross. Ah, here we are: 'Kenneth Dale, Esq., 31, Valpy Street, London, S.W.'" He tumbled the rest of the letters back into the bag and re-locked it. "Put it in your pocket and come along, or Winslade will think I am never coming back."

He was delayed a few moments longer, however, to admit the servants on their return from the village, and he handed the bag to one of them to be taken to the post-office.

In the library Sir James Winslade was seated at the chess-board, and Churt's private secretary, Gornay, a tall, slender figure, with a pale complexion and dark, clever eyes, was watching the game.

The secretary greeted Kenneth rather frigidly, and turned to Churt. "Have the letters gone to post yet?"

"Yes; did you want to send any?"

"Only a card that I might have written," Gornay answered, "but it isn't of any consequence"; and he sat down again beside the chess-players.

Churt had the black pieces, black nominally only, for actually they were the little red pieces of a travelling board. He appeared to have got into difficulties, and, greatly to the satisfaction of Kenneth, who was impatient to go in quest of Norah, the game came to an end after a few more moves.

"I don't see any way out of this," Churt remarked, after a final, perplexed survey of the position. "You come at me, next move, with queen or knight, and, either way, I am done for. It is your game. I resign."

"A lucky win for you, Sir James," Gornay observed.

"Why lucky?" Winslade asked. "You told us we had both violated every sound principle of development in the opening, but could Black have done any better for the last few moves?"

"He can win the game as the pieces now stand," Gornay answered.

He proved the statement by making a few moves on the board, and then replaced the pieces as they had been left.

"Well, it's your game fair and square, all the same," Churt remarked good-humouredly. "I should never have found the right reply for myself."

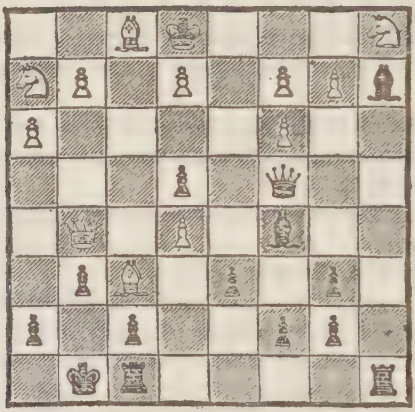
Gornay continued to study the board with attention, and his face assumed

an expression of keenness, as though he had discovered some fresh point to interest him in the position. At the moment Kenneth merely chafed at the delay. It was an hour or so later only that the secretary's comments on the game assumed for him a vital importance that made him recall them with particularity.

"If the play was rather eccentric sometimes, I must say it was bold and dashing enough on both sides," Gornay commented. "For instance, when Lord Churt gave up his knight for nothing, and when you gave him the choice of taking your queen with either of two pawns at your queen's knight's sixth." He turned to Churt. "Possibly you might have done better to take the queen with the bishop's pawn instead of with the rook's."

"I daresay, I daresay," Churt replied. "I should have probably got into a mess, whatever I played. But come along, now, all of you, and see if we can find some tea."

WHITE.



BLACK.

Black to play and win.

Kenneth contrived, before entering the drawing-room, to intercept Norah for an exchange of greetings in private, and her face was still radiant with the delight of the unexpected meeting as they entered the room.

After tea Sir James carried off the secretary to keep him company in the smoking-room, and Churt turned to Norah. "You must sing one of the Christmas carols you promised us, and then you young folk may go off to the library to talk over your own private affairs. I know you must both be longing to get away from us old fogies."

"Thank you, Lord Churt, for 'old fogies,' on behalf of your wife and myself," Aunt Blaxter commented, with a mild sarcasm that somehow failed of its in-

tended playful effect. But Norah had sat down at once to the piano, and her voice rang out in a joyous carol before he could frame a suitable reply.

A second carol was asked for, that the others might join in, and in the course of it Kenneth's hand came upon the letter in his pocket. He was opening the envelope as Norah rose from the piano. Her eye caught her own handwriting and she blushed very red. "Be careful, Ken. Don't let anything fall out!" she cried in alarm.

Thus warned, he drew the letter out delicately, being careful to leave in the envelope a little curl of brown hair, a lover's token that she would have been shy to see exposed to the eyes of the others. But, in his care for this, a thin bit of paper fluttered from the fold of the letter to the carpet, and all eyes instinctively followed it. It was a Bank of England note for a thousand pounds.

Kenneth looked at Norah in wonder, but got no enlightenment. Then at Lord Churt, as the bare possibility occurred to his mind that, in a Christmas freak of characteristic generosity, he might have somehow contrived to get it enclosed with her letter. But Churt's dumbfounded expression was not the acting of any genial comedy. His hands trembled as he put on his glasses to compare an entry in his pocket-book with the number on the note. He was the first to break the amazed silence. "This is a most extraordinary thing. This is the identical banknote that I put into the Red Cross envelope this afternoon as my Christmas gift, the very same that I got for the purpose of sending anonymously, and that you ladies were interested to inspect at breakfast time."

Each looked at the others for an explanation, till all eyes settled on Norah, as the person who might be expected to give one.

Churt looked vexed and troubled, Aunt Blaxter severely suspicious, as she saw that the girl remained silent, with a face that was losing its colour. "As the note was found in a letter sent by Norah, she would be the natural person to explain how it got there," she remarked.

"I haven't the remotest notion how it got there," Norah replied. "I can only say that I did not put it there, and that I never saw it again since breakfast time, until it dropped out of my letter a few moments ago."

"Very strange," Aunt Blaxter remarked, drily. Kenneth turned upon her hotly. "You don't suggest that Norah stole the note, I imagine!"

"My dear people," Churt intervened, soothingly, "do let us keep our heads cool, and not have any unpleasant scene."

Kenneth still glared. "If Norah had put the note into this envelope, she would have referred to it in her letter. I suppose you will accept my word that she doesn't."

"Read out the postscript, Ken," Norah requested. "Miss Blaxter may like to suggest that it refers to the note." The girl looked at her with a face that was now blazing with anger, and Kenneth read out: "P.S. Don't let anybody see what I am sending you!" It had not occurred to him that it could be taken as anything but a jesting reference to the lock of hair, the note of exclamation at the end giving the effect of "As though I should ever dream you would," or some equivalent. The matter was growing too serious for any shamefacedness, and he

produced the lock of hair in explanation. It was cruel luck, he reflected, that the unfortunate postscript should be capable of misconstruction. He had counted on Norah's making a triumphant conquest of the Churt household, and it was exceedingly galling to find her, instead, exposed to an odious suspicion. Aunt Blaxter's demeanour was all the more maddening that he could think of no means to prove its unreasonableness. He looked gratefully at Lady Churt, as her gentle voice gave the discussion a fresh turn. "How long has Mr. Gornay been with us?" she asked her husband.

Churt looked shocked. "My dear, we mustn't make any rash insinuations in a matter of this kind. What possible motive could Gornay have for putting the note into Norah's letter, if he meant to steal it? Besides, my evidence clears him."

"Would you mind telling us what you did with the note after you showed it at the breakfast table this morning?" Kenneth asked.

"I'll tell you exactly," Churt answered. "When it had made the round of the breakfast table, I put it back in my pocket-book and kept it in my pocket till this afternoon. It was while we were playing chess that I remembered that the bag would be going to post earlier than usual, and I put the note in the Red Cross envelope with the printed address and stuck it down and put it into the bag. I came straight back to the library, and I remember being surprised at the move I found Winslade had played because he was offering me his queen for nothing. Just at that moment it occurred to my mind that Norah had probably already put her letters into the bag, and that, if so, I might as well lock it at once, for fear of forgetting to do so later. I looked at the chess-board for a few minutes, standing up, and then went and found that Norah's letters were in the bag, and I locked it, and came back and took Winslade's queen."

"But I don't quite see what all that has to do with Mr. Gornay, or how it clears him," Lady Churt remarked.

"Why, my dear, whoever took the note out of one envelope, and put it into the other must have done so in the few minutes between my two visits to the bag. It was the only time that the letter was in the bag without its being locked. And during that time Gornay was watching the chess, so it can't have been him."

"Was he in the library all the time you were playing?" Kenneth asked.

"I can't say that," Churt replied. "I don't think he was. I didn't notice particularly. But I am positive that he did not enter or leave the room while I was standing looking at Winslade's move, and he must have been there when Winslade offered his queen and when I took it, because he was commenting on those very moves after the game was finished, and suggesting that I might have done better to take with the other pawn. You heard him yourself."

"Yes," Kenneth answered. "I follow that. But there is such a thing as picking a lock, you know."

"The makers guarantee that it can't be done to this one," Churt answered, "and the key has always been in my possession, so he couldn't have had a duplicate made, even if there had been any time."

Norah interposed in a voice that trembled with indignation. "In short, Lord Churt, you think the evidence conclusive against the only other person, except

Sir James Winslade, who was in the house. I have only my word to give against it."

"It is worth all the evidence in the world," Kenneth cried, and she thanked her champion with a bright glance.

"Lady Churt is quite right," Kenneth went on. "I'd stake my life it was that sneaking Gornay. Have him in here now, and see if his face doesn't show his guilt when I call him a thief."

"Not for the world!" Churt exclaimed, aghast. "We should have a most painful scene. This is no case for rash precipitancy." He assumed the air of judicial solemnity with which, from the local bench, he would fine a rascal five shillings who ought to have gone down for six months. "I entirely refuse to entertain any suspicions of anybody under this roof, guests, servants, or anyone else. It will probably turn out that some odd little accident has occurred, that will seem simple enough when it is explained. On the other hand, it is just conceivable that some evil-disposed person from outside should have got into the house, though I confess I can't understand the motive of their action if they did. In any case, I feel it my duty, for the credit of my household, to have the matter cleared up by the proper authority."

"What do you mean by the proper authority?" Lady Churt asked. "I didn't think the local police were very clever that time when poor Kelpie got stolen."

The Aberdeen terrier at her feet looked up at the sound of his name, and Churt continued: "I shall telephone to Scotland Yard. If Shapland is there, I am sure he would come down at once in his car. He could be here in less than two hours. Until he, or somebody else, arrives I beg that none of you say a word about this affair to anyone who is not now present in this room."

"Quite the most proper course," Aunt Blaxter observed. "It is only right that guilt should be brought home to the proper person, *whoever* that person may be."

With a tact of which Kenneth had hardly thought him capable, Churt turned to Norah. "I have no doubt Shapland will clear up the mystery for us satisfactorily. Meantime, my dear girl, you and I find ourselves in the same boat, for there is only my word for it that I ever put the note into the Red Cross envelope at all."

The kindness of his manner brought the tears to her eyes, and Kenneth took her away to the library.

"Fancy their thinking I was a thief—a thief, Ken—a common mean *thief!*"

"Nonsense, my darling girl," he said. "Nobody could believe any such rubbish."

"That odious Aunt Blaxter does, at any rate. She as good as said so." She sat down in a chair, and began to grow calmer, while he paced about the room, angry but thoughtful.

"I was glad I had you to stick up for me, Ken, and Lord Churt is an old dear."

"He's a silly old dear, all the same," he answered. "He has more money than he knows what to do with, but fancy fluttering a thousand-pound note through the Christmas post, to get lost among all the robins and good wishes!"

They were interrupted at this point by the entry of Gornay.

"I am not going to stay," he said, in answer to their not very welcoming expressions. "I have only come to ask a quite small favour. I am having a great argument with Sir James about character-reading from handwriting, and I want specimens from people we both know. Any little scrap will do."

Kenneth took up a sheet of note-paper from a writing table and wrote, "All is not gold that glitters," and Norah added below, "Birds of a feather flock together." It seemed the quickest way to get rid of him.

Gornay looked up at the sheet with a not quite satisfied air. "I would *rather* have had something not written specially. Nobody ever writes quite naturally when they know that it is for this sort of purpose. You haven't got an old envelope, or something like that?"

Neither could supply what he wanted, and he went off, looking a little disappointed.

"I wonder whether that was really what he wanted the writing for," Kenneth remarked, suspiciously. "He's a quick-witted knave. Look how sharp he was to see the right move in that game of chess. It wasn't very obvious."

The chess-board was lying open on the table, where Churt had left it before tea. He glanced at it, casually at first, and then with growing interest. He took up one of the pieces to examine it, then replaced it, to do the same with others, his manner showing all the time an increasing excitement.

"What is it, Ken?" Norah asked.

"Just a glimmer of something." He dropped into a chair. "I want to think—to think harder than ever in my life."

He leant forward, with his head resting on his hands, and she waited in silence till, after some minutes, he looked up.

"Yes, I begin to see light—more than a glimmer. He's a subtle customer, is Mr. Gornay, oh, very subtle!" He smiled, partly with the pleasure of finding one thread of a tangled web, partly with admiration for the cleverness that had woven it. "Would you like to know what he was really after when he came in here just now?"

"Very much," she answered. "But do you mean that he never had any argument with Sir James?"

"Oh, I daresay he had the argument all right—got it up for the occasion; but what he really wanted was this." He took out of his pocket the envelope in which the bank-note had been discovered. "The character-reading rot was not a bad shot at getting hold of it, and probably his only chance. But no, friend Gornay, you are not going to have that envelope—not for the thousand pounds you placed in it!"

"Do explain, Ken," Norah begged.

"I will presently," he answered, "but I want to piece the whole jigsaw together. There is still the other difficulty."

He dropped his eyes to the hearthrug again, and began to do his thinking aloud for her benefit. "Churt's reasoning is that Gornay must have been in here, watching the game, at the only time when the letters could have been tampered with, because he knew afterwards the move that was played just at the beginning

of that time, and the move that was played just at the end. But why might not Winslade have told him about those two moves while Churt was letting me in at the front door? That would solve the riddle. I should have thought Winslade would have been too punctilious to talk about the game while his opponent was out of the room, but I'll go and ask him. I needn't tell him the reason why I want to know."

He came back almost immediately. "No, there was no conversation about the game while Churt was out of the room. Very well. Try the thing the other way round. Assume—as I think I can prove—that Gornay *did* tamper with the letters, the question is how could he tell that those two moves had been played?"

He took up the chess-board again and looked at it so intently and so long that, at last, Norah grew impatient.

"My dear boy, what *can* you be doing, poring all this time over the chess?"

"I have a curious sort of chess problem to solve before the Sherlock Holmes man turns up from Scotland Yard. Follow this a moment. If there was any way by which Gornay could find out that the two important moves had been played, without being present at the time and without being told, then Churt's argument goes for nothing, doesn't it?"

"Clearly; but what other way was there? Did he look in through the window?"

"I think we shall find it was something much cleverer than that. I think I shall be able to show that he could infer that those two moves had been played, without any other help, from the position of the pieces as they stood at the end of the game; as they stand on the board now." He again bent down over the board. "White plays queen to queen's knight's sixth, not taking anything, and Black takes the queen with the rook's pawn; those are the two moves."

For nearly another half-hour Norah waited in loyal silence, watching the alternation of his face as it brightened with the light of comprehension and clouded again with fresh perplexity.

At last he shut up the board and put it down, looking profoundly puzzled.

"Can it not be proved that the queen must have been taken at that particular square?" Norah inquired.

"No," he answered. "It might equally have been a rook. I can't make the matter out. So many of the jigsaw bits fit in that I know I must be right, and yet there is just one little bit that I can't find. By jove!" he added, suddenly starting up, "I wonder if Churt could supply it?"

He was just going off to find out when a servant entered the room with a message that Lord Churt requested their presence in his study.

The conclave assembled in the study consisted of the same persons who, in the drawing-room, had witnessed the discovery of the bank-note, with the addition of Shapland, the detective from Scotland Yard. Lord Churt presided, sitting at the table, and Shapland sat by his side, with a face that might have seemed almost unintelligent in its lack of expression but for the roving eyes, that scrutinised in turn the other faces present.

Norah and Kenneth took the two chairs that were left vacant, and, as soon as the door was shut, Kenneth asked Churt a question.

"When you played your game of chess with Sir James Winslade this afternoon, did he give you the odds of the queen's rook?"

Everyone, except Norah and the sphinx-like detective, whose face gave no clue to his thoughts, looked surprised at the triviality of the question.

"I should hardly have thought this was a fitting occasion to discuss such a frivolous matter as a game of chess," Aunt Blaxter remarked sourly.

"I confess I don't understand the relevance of your question," Churt answered. "As a matter of fact, he did give me those odds."

"Thank God!" Kenneth exclaimed, with an earnestness that provoked a momentary sign of interest from Shapland.

"I should like to hear what Mr. Dale has to say about this matter," he remarked. "Lord Churt has put me in possession of the circumstances."

"I have an accusation to make against Lord Churt's private secretary, Mr. Gornay. Perhaps he had better be present to hear it."

"Quite unnecessary, quite unnecessary," Churt interposed. "We will not have any unpleasant scenes if we can help it."

"Very well," Kenneth continued. "I only thought it might be fairer. I accuse Gornay of stealing the thousand-pound bank-note out of the envelope addressed to the Red Cross and putting it into a letter addressed to me. *I accuse him of using colourless ink, of a kind that would become visible after a few hours, to cross out my address and substitute another,* the address of a confederate, no doubt."

"You must be aware, Mr. Dale," Shapland observed, "that you are making a very serious allegation in the presence of witnesses. I presume you have some evidence to support it?"

Kenneth opened the chess-board. "Look at the stains on those chess pieces. They were not there when the game was finished. They were there, not so distinctly as now, about an hour ago. Precisely those pieces, and only those, are stained that Gornay touched in showing that Lord Churt might have won the game. If they are not stains of invisible ink, why should they grow more distinct? If they are invisible ink, how did it get there, unless from Gornay's guilty fingers?"

He took out of his pocket the envelope of Norah's letter, and a glance at it brought a look of triumph to his face. He handed it to Shapland. "The ink is beginning to show there, too. It seems to act more slowly on the paper than on the polish of the chess-men."

"It is a difference of exposure to the air," Shapland corrected. "The envelope has been in your pocket. If we leave it there on the table, we shall see presently whether your deduction is sound. Meanwhile, if Mr. Gornay was the guilty person, how can you account for his presence in the library at the only time when a crime could have been committed?"

"By denying it," Kenneth answered. "What proof have we that he was there at that particular time?"

"How else could he know the moves that were played at that time?" Shapland asked.

Kenneth pointed again to the chess-board. "From the position of the pieces at the end of the game. Here it is. I can prove, from the position of those pieces alone, *provided the game was played at the odds of queen's rook*, that White must, in the course of the game, have played his queen to queen's knight's sixth, not making a capture, and that Black must have taken it with the rook's pawn. If I can draw those inferences from the position, so could Gornay. We know how quickly he can think out a combination from the way in which he showed that Lord Churt could have won the game, when it looked so hopeless that he resigned."

The detective, fortunately, had an elementary knowledge of chess sufficient to enable him to follow Kenneth's demonstration.

"I don't suggest," Kenneth added, when the accuracy of the demonstration was admitted, "that he planned this *alibi* beforehand. It was a happy afterthought, that occurred to his quick mind when he saw that the position at the end of the game made it possible. What he relied on was the invisible ink trick, and that would have succeeded by itself, if I hadn't happened to turn up unexpectedly in time to intercept my letter from Norah."

While Kenneth was giving this last bit of explanation, Shapland had taken up the envelope again. As he had foretold, exposure to the air had brought out the invisible writing so that, although still faint, it was already legible. Only the middle line of the address, the number and name of the street, had been struck out with a single stroke, and another number and name substituted. The detective handed it to Churt. "Do you recognise the second handwriting, my lord?"

Churt put on his glasses and examined it. "I can't say that I do," he answered, "but it is not that of Mr. Gornay." He took another envelope out of his pocket-book, addressed to himself in his secretary's hand, and pointed out the dissimilarity of the two writings. Norah cast an anxious look at Kenneth, and Aunt Blaxter one of her sourest at the girl. The detective showed no surprise.

"None the less, my lord, I think it might forward our investigation if you would have Mr. Gornay summoned to this room, I don't think you need be afraid that there will be any scene," he added, and, for an instant, the faintest of smiles flitted across his lips.

Churt rang the bell and told the servant to ask his secretary to come to him.

"Mr. Gornay left an hour ago, my lord. He was called away suddenly and doesn't expect to see his grandmother alive."

"Poor old soul! On Christmas Eve, too!" Churt muttered, sympathetically, and this time Shapland allowed himself the indulgence of a rather broader smile.

"I guessed as much," he observed, "when I recognised the handwriting in which the envelope had been redirected, or I should have taken the precautions of going to fetch the gentleman, whom you know as Mr. Gornay, myself. He is a gentleman who is known to us at the Yard by more than one name, as well as by more than one handwriting, and now that we have so fortunately discovered his present whereabouts, I can promise you that he will soon be laid by the

heels. Perhaps Lord Churt will be kind enough to have my car ordered and to allow me to use his telephone."

"But you'll stay to dinner?" Churt asked. "It will be ready in a few minutes, and we shall none of us have time to dress."

"I am much obliged, my lord, but Mr. Dale has done my work for me here in a way that any member of the Yard might be proud of, and now I must follow the tracks while they are fresh. It may not prove necessary to trouble you any further about this matter, but I think you are likely to see an important development in the great Ashfield forgery case reported in the newspapers before very long."

"Well," Churt observed, "I think we may all congratulate ourselves on having got this matter cleared up without any unpleasant scenes. Now we shall be able to enjoy our Christmas. I call it a happy solution, a very happy solution."

His face beamed with relief and good-humour as he once more produced his pocket-book. "Norah, my dear, you must accept an old man's apology for causing you a very unpleasant afternoon; and you must accept this as well. No, I shall not take a refusal, and it will be much safer to send a *cheque* to the Red Cross."

[*The solution of the end-game given in this story, and the proof that a white queen must have been taken by the pawn at Q Kt 3, is given herewith.*]

1. . . . . P to K 6; 2.
Q to R 6 (a), Q to R 5, ch.; 3.
Q (or B) takes Q, B to B 5; 4. Kt to Kt 3, B takes Kt and mates, very shortly, with R to R 8.

(a) 2. Kt to Kt 4, Q takes Kt; 3. Q (or P) takes Q (b), B to B 5 as before.

(b) If 3. Q to R 6, Q to R 5, ch., as before.

If 2. P to K Kt 4, B to Kt 6; 3. Kt takes B, Q takes Kt and wins.

The following is the proof, from the position of the pieces, that a white queen must have been taken by the pawn at Q Kt 3: All the black men except two are on the board; therefore White made only two captures. These two captures must have been made with the two pawns now at K 5 and B 3, because they have left their original files. White, therefore, never made a capture with his Q R P, and therefore it never got on to the knight's file. Therefore the black pawn at Q Kt 3 captured a *piece* (not a pawn). The game having been played at the odds of queen's rook, the white Q R was off the board before the game began, and the white K R was captured on its own square, or one of two adjacent squares, there being no way out for it.

Now, since Black captured a *piece* with the pawn at Q Kt 3, and there are no white *pieces* off the board (except the two white rooks that have been accounted for), it follows that whatever piece was captured by the pawn at Q Kt 3 must have been replaced on the board in exchange for the white Q R P when it reached its eighth square. It was not a rook that was captured at Q Kt 3, because the two white rooks have been otherwise accounted for. The pawn, on reaching its eighth square, cannot have been exchanged for a bishop, or the bishop would still be on that square, there being no way out for it, nor can the pawn have been exchanged for a knight for the same reason (remembering that the capture at Q Kt 3 must necessarily have happened *before* the pawn could reach its eighth square).

Therefore the pawn was exchanged for a queen, and therefore it was a queen that was captured at Q Kt 3, and when she went there she did not make a capture, because only two captures were made by White, both with pawns. Q.E.D.

Percival Wilde

THE ADVENTURE OF THE FALLEN ANGELS

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1

The atmosphere in the little room was electric. The explosion, one sensed rather than felt, would soon come.

From outside, far below in the street, came the occasional clatter of a belated taxi-cab. From above came the steady, unwinking glare of high-powered lights. The clock on the mantel, and the overflowing ash-trays, indicated the hour of two in the morning. Yet the men seated about the bridge table in the Himalaya Club, cutting in and out at the end of each rubber, played with a concentration that was apparently regardless of everything else.

Straker, so he asserted afterwards, had been on the verge of an apoplectic stroke since midnight. Billings clutched his cards in a nervous hand, and impatiently awaited the moment when the accusation would be made. Chisholm, who could watch the ticker spell out fluctuations which meant tens of thousands to him without turning a hair, bit the ends of his straggly moustache from time to time, and hoped that his exterior did not betray his excitement.

Like the others, Chisholm had absolute confidence in Anthony P. Claghorn —"Tony" Claghorn to his intimates—who, by his own admission, was an expert on everything having to do with games of chance; but, as the minutes stretched into hours, and as Claghorn, with not a wrinkle in his lofty brow, confined himself to smoking the best cigars that the Himalaya Club—and his hosts—provided, and refrained from uttering a word, Chisholm's worries multiplied.

He could not assert that Tony had been an inattentive spectator. At nine, promptly, the game had begun. At nine, promptly, Tony had pulled up the most comfortable chair, and had anchored in it. At half-hourly intervals or thereabouts rubbers had ended, and the six players, cutting to determine the four to play next, had changed seats. At half-hourly intervals or thereabouts Tony, without moving, had called for a fresh cigar.

At ten Chisholm had glanced at Tony questioningly. Tony had replied with an innocent stare. At intervals from then on to midnight, Straker, Billings, Hotchkiss, and Bell had glanced questioningly at the silent young man. He had given them glance for glance—but no satisfaction. Yet during the preceding afternoon Tony had discoursed eloquently upon the ease with which he would solve the mystery.

To be sure, it had been a mystery of Tony's own creating. Roy Terriss,

the suspect, had not been looked upon as such until Tony, by a few well-chosen words, had called the attention of his clubmates to the fact that Roy was a remarkably consistent winner. Before that time it had been admitted that Roy was generally successful at bridge; that he enjoyed playing in an expensive game; and that the game was rarely, if ever, expensive for him. It was Tony who pointed out that Roy's gains, during a winter's play, probably amounted well up into five figures; and it was Tony who, without making direct accusations, had raised his eyebrows significantly at moments when that simple act was not altogether beneficial to Roy's reputation.

Having created the mystery, he had been invited to solve it. With becoming modesty he had accepted the task, and, after sitting solemnly through one five-hour session, had expressed a desire to sit through another. This wish granted, he had declared his intention of being present on yet a third occasion. The results had been painful to his friends, who, expecting they hardly knew what, had thrown caution to the winds, and had been divested of large sums by Terriss, who, knowing nothing at all of what was afoot, had played calmly, coldly, and with deadly precision.

Chisholm, indeed, had explained his own mistakes to Tony that very afternoon. "I'm a conservative player," he had asserted earnestly. "I follow the book. I know the rules, and I don't try to improve on them. I don't overbid, and, if the other fellow overbids, I'm a sharp at doubling. But when I'm expecting the whole game to blow up any minute, I can't put my mind on it, and I don't play like myself."

"Even at twenty-five cents a point?"

"What does twenty-five cents a point matter when I'm waiting for you to start the fireworks? Take that hand last night: it was good for three odd. I bid up to five. That wasn't like me, was it? Then Terriss doubled—that's what any sane, level-headed player would have done, holding his cards; and, instead of shutting up and taking my medicine like a little man, what did I do but redouble! Claghorn, I put it to you: was that the act of a normal man? Was that the kind of play you'd look for from me? Then the finesses didn't hold, and I got set for eight hundred points."

Tony smiled reminiscently. "That was a most instructive hand," he commented. "Now, if you had doubled his four instead of going up yourself—"

Chisholm cut him short with a growl.

"Look here," he pointed out succinctly, "we didn't get you into this to give us bridge lessons, you know. If we wanted lessons, we could get them for about a tenth of what his performance is costing us. You said there was something queer about the game. We're waiting to be shown, that's all."

At two o'clock, ten hours later, Chisholm was still waiting.

Billings, neat and dapper, a stickler for etiquette, had, upon this third evening, to his everlasting embarrassment, been detected in a revoke. He had paid the penalty promptly—graciously; had, indeed, insisted upon its being exacted. But the look which he had given Tony had explained more eloquently than could any number of words how he had come to be guilty. And Hotchkiss, fumbling

his cards nervously, had failed to cover an honour with an honour—with results which bulked large when the score was added.

And at two o'clock, Billings and Hotchkiss, as well as Straker, Bell, and Chisholm, were waiting—waiting.

The great moment, the long-anticipated moment, came when it was least expected. At two-fifteen the men had adjourned hopelessly. Chisholm was balancing the score; his confederates had already opened their cheque-books; Terriss, with folded arms, was waiting to learn the exact amount of his gains.

It was then that Tony flicked the ash from the tip of his cigar, and spoke. "Mr. Terriss is again the only winner," he murmured, as if to himself. "I wonder what he would say if I mentioned that the cards with which he has been winning are marked."

In an instant Terriss was on his feet.

"What did you say, Claghorn?" he thundered. "What did you say?"

Tony stood his ground stoutly. "I made the statement," he declared, "that you have been winning with marked cards." He took up the two packs that had been used in the bridge game, and balanced them in his hands. "I still make that statement."

"You ——!" shouted Terriss, and dashed at him.

Chisholm thrust his bulk between.

"Take it easy, Terriss," he suggested, "we all know what's been going on. Mr. Claghorn has been looking into things for us."

Terriss gazed around the circle of faces.

"What's this? A conspiracy?" he demanded.

Chisholm shook his head. "Terriss, you know us better than that. Bell, Hotchkiss, Straker, Billings—they've all got reputations to lose, not to mention me. We've asked Mr. Claghorn to investigate. That's all."

"And how is Mr. Claghorn qualified to pass upon such matters? What right has Mr. Claghorn to make accusations against me?"

A chorus answered him. Straker, it appeared, had been present upon a certain occasion when Tony had unmasked one Schwartz. Billings, who had been another witness of that feat, contributed details of the manner in which Tony had exposed a sharper at Palm Beach. Chisholm, a third witness, had half a dozen stories at his finger tips.

Tony Claghorn's career, it was evident from their testimony, had been one long succession of triumphs. His wake was dotted with discomfited cheats, prestidigateurs, and impostors. Once put upon the scent, he had never failed to bring down his man.

With appropriate modesty Tony bowed his head while his friends detailed his triumphs. To be sure, the credit for each victory was wholly due to one Bill Parmelee, an unassuming countryman whose acquaintance Tony had made one summer; and Tony, not once, but a dozen times, had explained how his own contribution to the various episodes which had since become famous was of the slightest. But Tony's explanations must have lacked the convincing note, for his friends did not hesitate to trumpet his praises to the four corners of the earth.

That they should forget the quiet young man who had played the leading rôle was not unnatural; Parmelee, farmer and reformed gambler, cared nothing for advertising, and chose to remain out of sight. Almost mechanically his laurels descended upon Claghorn, who, despite his protestations, found the eminence thus forced upon him far from unpleasant.

When Terriss's monotonous success at bridge had come to Tony's attention, he had attempted to interest Parmelee in the matter. He had failed. Parmelee, Cincinnatus of gamblers, cared more for his blooded cattle than for fresh laurels. And he had not agreed entirely with Claghorn's conclusions.

"Tony, because a man's a winner, it doesn't follow that he's a cheat," he had pointed out.

"No, but in this case—"

"In any case," Parmelee had interrupted, "you must remember that for every dollar won by dishonest gambling, a thousand are probably won by honest play."

"You don't really believe that!"

"I don't know whether I do or not. But that's what I like to think."

Tony's enthusiasm had been damped, but not extinguished. After revolving the subject in his mind overnight, he had decided that he himself was entirely competent, and that Bill's confidence in human nature was, to say the very least, exaggerated. Wherefore, Tony had gallantly launched himself into the breach.

He smiled at Terriss across the table. Success was his, and its taste was sweet.

"Marked cards, Mr. Terriss," he repeated, "marked cards."

Terriss glanced at the set faces about him, and his assurance decreased visibly.

"I suppose," he faltered, "that it will be quite useless for me to say that I didn't know the cards were marked."

"Quite useless," said Tony.

"I won fairly and squarely, I played the game according to the rules."

"What's the good of arguing?" enquired Straker icily.

Terriss gazed about helplessly. "No; there's no good in arguing if you're all against me," he assented. "What do you expect me to do?"

"Make good."

"How?"

"Give back what you won."

Terriss snorted. "I'll be damned if I do," he declared.

"If you don't," said Chisholm, "you will forfeit your membership in this club."

"And if I do," challenged Terriss, "will I hold on to it? Am I the kind of man whom you want to remain? What's the difference whether I give back my winnings or not—except to me? I've been caught cheating, haven't I? That makes me an undesirable member by itself, doesn't it? Of course, I say that I played honestly: that's what you'd expect me to say. But, even if I gave back my winnings, you won't believe me."

"It's the correct thing to do, Terriss," said Straker quietly.

"What does the correct thing matter to a man who has been caught cheating?

No; if I'm to be hanged, I'd rather be hanged as a wolf than as a lamb." He took up the score, and surveyed the totals. "Gentlemen, you owe me money. Write your cheques."

"What?" gasped Chisholm.

"You've lost. Pay me."

"What about the marked cards?"

"Well, what about them? If there are marked cards, you may have profited by them yourself. Try and prove you didn't."

"I lost!" spluttered Chisholm, nearly speechless.

"What of that? If the cards hadn't been marked you might have lost still more. And that applies to all of us." With supreme self-confidence he beamed upon the players. "Pay me," he invited; "pay me, or I'll bring suit against every man jack of you. You see, I no longer have a reputation to lose, and it won't hurt me to go to court. But if you fellows think you will enjoy the publicity, if you look forward to seeing your names decorating the front pages of the newspapers, just try getting out of your debts."

Helplessly the conspirators turned to Tony. "What do you advise?" they asked as one man.

Tony shrugged his shoulders. "This is out of my department," he said modestly.

Straker glanced about keenly. "You know," he said brightly, "Terriss may be bluffing."

Terriss grinned. "If that's what you think, why don't you call his bluff?"

There was a pause. Then Billings seized his pen and dashed off a cheque. "Here you are," he said ungraciously, "I have a wife and two daughters. I can't afford to get mixed up in a scandal."

"Quite so," said Terriss. "I thought you'd see the point after I'd explained it to you."

One by one the men wrote cheques, and passed them to the lone winner. He pocketed them carefully, rose, surveyed the conspirators. "Gentlemen," he murmured, "I am about to leave you, to return to my poor but honest domicile. And I have one last request to make of you: don't tell anybody what happened in this room to-night; don't breathe a word of it to your closest friend."

Straker laughed aloud. "Won't we?" he cackled, "Oh, won't we? I'll make it my business to see that every man in this club knows just what took place in twenty-four hours."

Terriss smiled ominously. "In that event, Straker," he warned, "don't pretend you're surprised when I bring suit for criminal libel."

"What?"

"Against each and every one of you." At the threshold he paused. "I can't stop you from blackening my reputation among yourselves; you seem to have done that pretty thoroughly, anyhow. But let me hear that any one of you has dared to say a word against me outside of this room, and I'll hit back? By George, I will! I'll hit back, and I'll hit back hard! Marked cards! Who brought them into the game? Who profited by them? Who didn't profit by them?" A mocking smile

hovered upon his lips as he opened the door. "Gentlemen, think it over! Before you do anything, think it over—and then don't do it!"

The latch clicked, and he was gone.

It was Billings who first broke an agonised silence. "Another such victory," he soliloquised, "and we'll all be broke. What do we do next, Claghorn?"

But that worthy, pausing only to light a fresh cigar, had prudently retreated to the threshold.

"What do we do next, Claghorn?" Hotchkiss echoed.

Tony shrugged his shoulders. "This is out of my department," he said modestly.

Long, long after he had left, gently closing the door behind him, the conspirators sat round the table, comparing notes, exchanging advice, and sympathising with each other's misfortunes. But that, however interesting in itself, has nothing to do with this story.

2

There are always several ways of looking at a matter. A disinterested judge, for example, might hesitate to characterise the episode which we have recounted as a triumph for Mr. Anthony P. Claghorn. But Claghorn himself spoke of it as a triumph without question. He had set out to expose a sharper; he had succeeded. That the operation had been monstrously costly to his friends was not so important as the fact that it had attained its object. Tony, indeed, did not use stronger terms than "triumph" only because stronger terms did not occur to him.

To his pretty wife he related his exploit with gusto. She understood nothing of cards, but Tony wanted admiration, and her admiration was better than none. But the approbation which mattered most was that of Bill Parmelee, and to that Tony looked forward eagerly. Half a dozen times Tony had been a mystified spectator while Bill, moving along curious lines, had laid the foundations of one of his many victories. It had been Tony's part to observe, to wonder, and to applaud at the conclusion of each carefully planned campaign.

Now, Tony felt modestly, the rôles were reversed. Without help from his friend, acting entirely upon his own initiative he—Tony—had brought his attack to a successful conclusion. It would be Bill's turn to listen while Tony condescended to explain. In the anticipation it was all very pleasant, and Tony lost no time in scurrying to the little town in which Parmelee had immured himself.

"I was satisfied that something was wrong," Tony began magisterially, "oh, long ago; ever so long ago."

"In spite of what I said?" Bill enquired.

"What did you say?" asked Tony tolerantly.

"I tried to convince you that a man can be a winner without being a cheat."

"Oh, yes; I remember that."

"I said that for every dollar won by dishonest gambling, a thousand are probably won by honest play."

"I remember that also," Tony admitted, and lighted a cigar, "but your faith in human nature is—shall we say—exaggerated? In this case the suspect—I'd rather not tell you his name—broke down and admitted everything."

"Well! Well!" said Bill. "Go on with your story."

"I investigated the case carefully. I used a process of elimination. The game was bridge. Certain methods of cheating were, therefore, useless."

"Quite correct."

"A hold-out, for example, would be of no value," said Tony, and went on to explain the nature of a hold-out to the man who had initiated him into its mysteries. "By a hold-out," he volunteered graciously, "I mean a device which can be used for the purpose of keeping one or more cards in concealment until the player wants them in his own hand."

Not a vestige of a smile was visible on Bill's placid countenance. "I have heard there were such devices," he murmured.

"Quite so; but as I have explained to you, the suspect—whom I prefer not to call by name—could not possibly have used one. It would have meant introducing a fifty-third card into a complete deck, and that would have been detected at once. You see, if Ter— the suspect had introduced a fifth ace into his hand it would inevitably have duplicated an ace in some other hand. Whenever all the cards are dealt out, a hold-out becomes worthless."

Bill stared at the carpet intently. "Not altogether worthless," he qualified.

"Altogether worthless," Tony insisted.

"A hold-out might be used on the deal itself," murmured Bill, as if to himself. "The—ahem!—suspect might put all four aces and all four kings as well into a hold-out, offer the pack to be cut without them, and pass them into his own hand on the deal."

"What?" gasped Tony.

Bill continued unemotionally. "Of course, that would be pretty raw. Nobody but a beginner would try to get away with anything like that. A really sharp player, playing bridge, would pass the top cards into his partner's hand. His partner, you see, wouldn't have to be a confederate: give him more than his share of aces and kings, and he'd go a no-trumper, wouldn't he? In all innocence he'd make the correct bid. It would be quite enough for the sharper, sitting across the table, to give him the cards warranting it."

"By George!" ejaculated Tony. "I never thought of that!"

"There are still other ways in which a hold-out might be used without duplicating any one of the fifty-two cards in the deck, but it's not necessary to discuss them. Go on, Tony."

It was with a sensation that the wind had been taken out of his sails that the young man continued. "Rightly or wrongly, I decided that the suspect was not using a hold-out. You don't think he was, Bill?" he interjected anxiously.

"No."

"I continued with my process of elimination. There are many cheating devices. In bridge most of them are useless. But one cheating device is useful in

every card game." He paused, to aim a long forefinger at his friend. "I refer, of course, to marked cards."

"Ah-ha!"

"I examined the cards carefully. They were not marked. But I risked everything on a bold bluff," chortled Tony, "and it worked. I made one heap of all my winnings," he misquoted, "and I risked it all on one pitch—on one pitch—I forget how it goes on."

"Cut out the poetry and tell me what happened."

"I picked the psychological instant. I've always been good at that—picking the psychological instant—and I boldly accused Ter— the suspect of using marked cards. I knew well enough he wasn't using them. Here"—and Tony produced the cards themselves from capacious pockets—"here they are—unmarked. But I understand human nature, and I felt sure that if I accused a cheat of cheating he would—ahem!—collapse. Whether or not I happened to mention the exact method he was using did not matter; the accusation would be enough."

"Did it work?"

"To perfection. Ter— the suspect was silent, and silence is confession."

Bill smiled. "Is it?" he queried. "If so, a sleeping man is guilty of anything and everything."

"The suspect knew the game was up."

"Perhaps he felt you were carrying too many guns for him. What was the use of pleading innocence when you—and your friends—were convinced he was guilty?"

"I made it a point to treat—ahem!—the suspect with scrupulous fairness."

"Why not call him by his name? Roy Terriss?"

"How did you know?" gasped Tony.

"That's neither here nor there. Go on."

But Tony was too astonished to continue. "How did you know?" he demanded. "How on earth did you know?"

Bill shook his head. "We'll skip that for the time being. Finish your story."

Tony gazed at his friend with some bewilderment. He had looked forward to this moment of triumph. In the realisation it was not so satisfactory as in prospect. He passed a shaky hand over his brow. "Perhaps you can finish the story yourself, Bill?"

"Perhaps I can. Terriss admitted nothing. Terriss denied nothing. He refused to give back the money he had won. That took nerve, and I admire him for it. He knew he had no chance of vindicating himself. He decided to wait for a better opportunity."

Tony nodded reluctantly. "Most of that's quite correct," he admitted grudgingly.

"You accused Terriss of playing with marked cards. He replied that if the cards were marked he hadn't benefited by it. And he added what was, after all, a logical conclusion: that the marks might have been of value to your friends."

"Absurd on the face of it," commented Tony, "the cards aren't marked."

"Not so absurd as you think," qualified Bill, and his face set in stern lines. "The cards *are* marked."

3

Sometimes the word "surprise" is too feeble fully to express a state of mind. Indeed, to picture Tony's reaction to his friend's simple announcement in reasonably accurate terms, it would be necessary to overhaul, refurbish, and expand the English dictionary.

Tony gazed at Bill with eyes that popped out of his head, opened his mouth two or three times, wetted his lips, and spluttered, "Wh-what did you say?"

"I said," repeated Bill, "that these cards are marked."

"But they can't be!" exploded Tony. "Don't you see? That was the whole beauty of my bluff—that the cards were what they should be, and that I made him believe they were something else."

Bill smiled grimly. "Sometimes a bluff isn't a bluff. Sometimes a man shoots in the dark and hits the bull's-eye. Sometimes a well-meaning blunderer like you, Tony, tells the truth when he least suspects it."

"But it's impossible! I've examined those cards with a magnifying glass! I've gone over them not once, but a dozen times! I haven't found a thing!"

"Tony, you didn't know what to look for." Bill spread half a dozen cards on a convenient table. "In the first place, the cards are of an uncommon pattern. You notice the two little angels in the centre? They're what is known as 'Angel-Backs!'"

"They're the cards that the club supplies."

"I don't doubt that."

"For the last eight months no other cards have been used at the Himalaya."

"Then how about these?" Bill spread half a dozen cards from the second pack on the table.

Tony gave the cards, decorated with a conventional geometrical design, only a glance. "Oh, those? Those are poorer-class cards which the club laid in when it began to run short of the better ones."

"The Angel-Backs being the better class?"

"Of course. You can see that in a minute."

Bill half-closed his eyes reminiscently.

"When I made my living as a gambler—when I was just beginning to learn the ropes—Angel-Backs were fairly common. They were good cards. They were high-priced, but they were worth it. They gradually dropped out of use; cheaper cards took their place. To-day people don't care about quality; it is price that matters. In fact, this pack of Angel-Backs is the first that I have seen in some years. I was under the impression that they were no longer being manufactured."

Tony could not restrain his impatience.

"Come back to the subject, Bill," he begged. "You said the cards were marked. Which pack? And how are they marked?"

"The Angel-Backs, of course. Look at the angels closely."

"I see nothing."

Bill smiled. "This angel, for example, must have gone walking in the mud. His right foot is not as clean as it might be."

"What of that?"

"This other angel evidently put one hand into the mud. You'll notice it's dirty. This third angel knelt in it: there's some on one of his knees. And this fourth angel must have been doing somersaults; you'll notice his complexion has become decidedly swarthy."

"By George!" ejaculated Tony.

"Go through the pack," invited Bill, "and you'll find that there isn't an angel in it who wouldn't be the better for a bath. And you'll find—it's a pure coincidence, doubtless—that the kings have marks on their right shoulders, the queens marks on their left shoulders, the jacks marks at the waist-line, and so on through the lot. The angels are small—and the marks are still smaller—but they're very evident when you're looking for them."

Without a word Tony whipped out a magnifying glass, and bent over the cards. "You're right!" he said excitedly; "you're right. And that proves my case beyond a doubt."

"What do you mean?"

"Terriss was using marked cards. My guess hit the nail on the head. Terriss marked the cards while the game was under way."

"Marked them as delicately as this? As accurately? Tony, don't you believe it!"

"But cards can be marked during the progress of a game."

"Yes—with a prick, or with a spot of colour. But to mark cards like this? To select a minute speck on the back of each, and dot it as neatly as these are dotted? That takes time, skill, and privacy. The man who marked those cards did it in his room."

"You mean Terriss brought the marked pack with him, and substituted it for one we were using?"

"Not likely."

"Why not? It could have been done."

"It's most improbable. You'll notice that every card in the pack is marked—not the high cards alone."

"What of that?"

"What would be the object—in bridge? Really fine players place the cards as far down as the sevens and eights. But who ever heard of taking a finesse against a three-spot? Or a four? Or a five? Why should any sane man take the trouble—and the risk—to mark them?"

Tony corrugated his brow. "Perhaps," he hazarded, "perhaps the man who marked the cards was keen on doing a thorough job. Having begun, he didn't know when to stop."

Bill shook his head decisively. "It won't do, Tony. It won't do at all. An amateur might have done that—you might have done that at a first attempt—but the man we are looking for is a professional, or I know nothing about gambling and gamblers. Look at the beauty of the work! See how perfectly his

shading matches the colour of the backs! And, remember, if he marked the twos and threes there was a good reason."

Tony shrugged his shoulders. "Reason or no reason, I can't see that it's of any particular importance."

But Bill was already studying a time-table. "The next train for town leaves in forty minutes," he mentioned. "I'm going to pack my bag."

Tony gazed at him with surprise.

"Going to town because the twos and threes are marked? Really, I think you're exaggerating their importance."

"It would be difficult to do that," said Bill. He rose and glanced keenly at his friend. "In the first place, they prove that Roy Terriss is innocent."

"How so?"

"I have been given to understand that he plays no other game than bridge."

"Yes; that's so."

"Well, the man who marked these cards didn't expect to play bridge at all. That's my second point, Tony. The man who marked the cards didn't neglect the little ones for the soundest reason in the world."

"And what's that?" asked Tony scornfully.

Bill opened his valise, and began to jam articles of clothing into it. He glanced at his friend and smiled, opened his mouth to speak, closed it, and smiled again. "Tony, hasn't it struck you yet?" he demanded at length. "The man who marked these cards expected to play poker!"

4

Upon every other occasion that Parmelee had accompanied him to town, Tony had been filled with happy anticipation. It had meant, invariably, that the man-hunt was on in earnest; that a pursuit which would end only with the exposure of the guilty individual was under way. In the past Tony—a privileged spectator, knowing enough to whet his curiosity to the utmost, but never knowing quite as much as he wanted to—had enjoyed a long succession of happy thrills.

Not once, but half a dozen times, had he observed Parmelee picking up a scent like a well-trained bloodhound, disentangling it from others, following it to a surprising conclusion. Tony had watched, wondered, admired; here was drama, hot off the griddle, served in the most appetising fashion, and the clubman, whose chief entertainment, in earlier days, had been provided by the headlines of the sensational newspapers, had come to learn that a thrill at first hand was worth a dozen relayed through print. It had all been most enjoyable—yet Tony, upon this particular occasion, was conscious of no pleasurable feelings.

He gazed gloomily out of the window and gave himself up to unhappy reflections. The cards had been marked; Terriss was not the guilty man. Both facts, Tony was compelled to admit, were crystal clear. It followed, as night follows day, that the criminal must be one of his own particular cronies: Chisholm, Billings, Hotchkiss, Bell, or Straker. Tony reviewed the list to the accom-

paniment of the click of the wheels. Man-hunting, he admitted, was a sport which eclipsed all other sports; but somehow it lost its zest when the prospective victim was one of his own friends.

After half an hour's gloomy meditation he turned to the quiet countryman at his side. "Bill," he ventured tentatively, "I take it that when you reach town you will want to go to the Himalaya Club."

"You take it correctly."

"It's not necessary, you know."

"Why not?"

"Well, really, I haven't asked you to investigate anything."

"That's all right, old fellow," Bill responded heartily; "I haven't waited to be asked."

Tony's voice carried a gentle tinge of reproof. "Don't you think," he enquired tactfully, "that you should wait until you are asked?"

Bill laughed. "Meaning, I suppose, that I'm butting in——"

"I wouldn't say that."

"No; but it's what you are thinking." He glanced shrewdly at Claghorn. "Tony, old fellow, you shot in the dark, and you brought down the wrong man. You have branded Roy Terriss a crooked gambler—a cheat, a thief—a man unfit to be received in decent society. Do you want him to rest under that cloud?"

"No, no, indeed," began Tony vociferously, "that's not what I mean at all——"

"Of course not," Bill chimed in; "you're too fair and square to tolerate anything like that. You want Terriss cleared—cleared triumphantly—only"—and Bill smiled shrewdly—"only you're rather scared that I'm going to fix the blame on one of your very best friends. Isn't that so?"

Tony nodded.

Bill grinned. "That's what might happen, no doubt. I'm not denying it. If I merely wanted to bag a man, and didn't care how I did it, I think I could convict any one of your friends—or you yourself, for that matter."

"Convict me?" gasped Tony.

"It could be done. How did you come by those marked cards?"

"Why, why, I took them from the table."

"How did they get there? How do I know you didn't mark them yourself? How do I know that you and your friends weren't banded together to rob Terriss?"

It was Tony's turn to grin. "Well, we lost."

"To Terriss, perhaps. But the night before the same crowd won pretty heavily from somebody else—what?"

"How did you know that?"

"It doesn't matter," said Bill; "I know it—that's enough. I'm simply trying to show you how easy it would be to find a victim if I were after no more than that. You and your friends have touched pitch, Tony, and you can't touch pitch without being defiled."

Tony's brain whirled. "You mean, then," he sputtered, "you mean that the

guilty man is Chisholm—or Billings—or Straker—or Bell—or Hotchkiss—or—or me?"

Bill laughed. "If it will comfort you—and I think it will—I'll let you into a secret, and tell you that I don't suspect any of them—or you, I mean," he corrected gravely.

Tony felt a crushing weight rising buoyantly, easily, happily. "Do you mean that?" he cried.

"We're looking for a professional cheat," said Bill. "Remember that. Hold fast to that. It's the only thing, Tony, between you yourself and the deep sea. You've been worrying about your friends so much that you've completely overlooked what a suspicious character somebody else is."

"Who?" begged Tony.

"Tony Claghorn," said Bill—he smiled at his friend's consternation—"Tony Claghorn has been running around with me so much that he has acquired a first-hand knowledge of cheating devices. How do you know he hasn't used that knowledge? How do you know he hasn't tried to convert theory into practice? It would be profitable—very profitable—and he might get away with it. No, Tony," said Bill, "Roy Terriss is safe. It's Tony Claghorn we have to look after now. And if I'm going to town it's because I think I see a chance to save his skin."

Tony was so completely dumbfounded that he was silent for the rest of the trip.

5

It was between hours at the Himalaya Club when the two men walked in. The regulars, who ate their lunch in the raftered dining-hall every day, had departed, and the even-more regulars, who experimented with games of chance in its card-room from late afternoon until early morning, had not yet arrived.

"We'd better go away and come back later," said Tony.

"Why not wait here?" suggested Bill. He seated himself at a table. "Tony, how would you like to play some cold hands?"

Tony gazed at his friend with a suspicious eye. "What stake?" he enquired.

"Why any stake at all?" countered Bill. "We'll play for nothing—and the fun of it."

Tony assented doubtfully. Ordinarily filled with implicit trust in his friends, his adventure on the train had sadly shook his equilibrium. He—Tony—was under suspicion. Any move of Bill's might therefore be dangerous to him. In some vague, incomprehensible manner disaster threatened—with the most innocent exterior.

With noticeable lack of enthusiasm he seated himself at the table and rang for cards.

Bill glanced at the box and did not open it. "I don't care for these cards," he announced. "Can't we have some Angel-Backs?"

"I'll see, sir," said the man.

Tony's suspicions redoubled. "What's the matter with the cards," he enquired.

"I like to play with cards of better quality," the countryman alleged. His eyes shone as the waiter returned with a pack of the required pattern.

He broke the seal, opened the box, and riffled the cards thoughtfully.

"Do you like these better?" Tony asked.

"Much better. Very much better." He dealt the cards, face down, with amazing speed. "King of hearts. Two of diamonds. Eight of hearts. Ace of spades. Three of clubs. Seven of spades. Ten of hearts. Seven of clubs. Five of hearts. Seven of hearts."

"What's this?" demanded Tony—"legerdemain?"

Bill shrugged his shoulders. "Call it what you like. But if you will look at your cards you will find that you have a four-flush in hearts. You will fill on the draw. The card on top of the pack is another heart."

"And you?" gasped Tony.

"Triplets; nothing but triplets," smiled Bill; "three sevens."

"And they'll be four of a kind on the draw?"

"That would be too raw, old fellow. No, a full house will be enough. That will beat your flush."

Tony broke into a roar of laughter. "I see it!" he cried. "Of course I see it!"

"What do you see?"

"You stacked the cards!"

"That's pretty evident."

"And they weren't hard to stack because you substituted the marked pack—the pack I brought up to the country—for the new pack the waiter handed you!"

"Is that so?" challenged Bill.

"These cards are marked!"

"Admitted."

"They must be the same pack, unless—unless——"

"Well, say it."

"Unless," faltered Tony, with cold sweat breaking out suddenly on his brow, "unless every pack of Angel-Backs in the club is marked!"

Bill smiled. "That's what I'm trying to find out," he granted.

"They may all be—shall we say?—Fallen Angels."

Without a word Tony rang for the waiter. "We want another pack—two more packs—of Angel-Backs," he snapped.

The waiter shook his head. "Sorry, sir, I can't do it."

"Why not?"

"We're running very short of the Angel-Backs, and the members prefer them to the other cards. They're better quality. The steward instructed me not to give out more than one pack to a party."

Tony extracted a banknote from his pocket. "I want two packs of Angel-Backs," he repeated. "Do you understand?"

"I'll do what I can," said the waiter. He was back in a few minutes with a single pack. "I couldn't get you two," he apologised. "There's not a gross left, sir. I'm breaking orders as it is, sir."

In silence Tony passed the unopened box to his friend. "Open it, Bill."

Parmelee put his hands behind his back. "Open it yourself. You might accuse me of substituting another pack."

Without a word Tony broke the seal, inverted the box, and allowed the cards to cascade upon the table.

"Well?" Bill enquired.

"Marked—marked; every blamed one of them!"

"Fallen Angels!" murmured Parmelee, "Fallen Angels! Tony, don't you think we might have a chat with the steward?"

Tony clenched his fists. "If he's the man who marked them I'll see that he's out of a job in ten minutes!"

"Why so excitable?" soothed Bill. "What would the steward have to gain by trickery? He isn't the man we want, you can depend upon that."

He listened quietly while his explosive friend summoned the steward, and explained the state of affairs to that worthy. The man examined the cards, paled, bit his lips. "Really, sir," he stammered, "this is most surprising—most surprising—"

"It is!" asseverated Tony.

"I wouldn't believe it if I didn't see it with my own eyes. It's monstrous—incredible!"

"How do you explain it?"

"I—I don't."

"How do we know that you're not the guilty man?"

"Oh, sir, I've been in the employ of this club for twenty-eight years! It would be late in life for me to turn round and become a common cheat. Really, sir, you don't think that I could be capable of such a thing?"

Bill broke into the conversation. "How many more packs of Angel-Backs have you?"

"Less than a gross."

"Why didn't you order more?"

"I did. The jobber couldn't fill my orders."

"Oh!" Bill half closed his eyes. "When did you first buy Angel-Backs?"

"About a year ago, sir. Shall I tell you about it?"

"I wish you would."

"A sample pack was sent us by a mail-order house. The International Supply Company, they called themselves."

"What was their address?"

"A post-office box at Times Square Station, New York City, sir."

"Go on."

"Samples are sent to us frequently, but this sample was unusually good."

"Angel-Backs—I should think so!"

"Not only that, but the cards were remarkably cheap; so cheap, in fact, that the club could sell them at the same price as inferior cards and still make money."

"Didn't that make you suspicious?"

"The International Supply Company explained that the pattern was about to

be discontinued, and that they had a large quantity on hand. If we would take them all, they would make us a special price, sir. I didn't make the purchase on my own responsibility. I referred the matter to the House Committee. They told me to go ahead."

"What else?"

"That's all, sir. The members liked the cards, as I explained they would. We used nothing else for many months. Then the Angel-Backs began to run short. I tried to buy more."

"Your letters to the International Supply Company were returned unclaimed?"

"Yes, sir. They had gone out of business."

Bill smiled. "The scent becomes more interesting as we follow it." He turned to his friend. "Tony, what's the next move?"

"To examine the rest of the cards, of course."

Bill's eye twinkled, but he nodded soberly. "Suppose you do that, Tony. There are over a hundred packs left, so it will take time. But be thorough about it: go through every pack, and tabulate your results in writing."

6

After his volcanic friend had departed Bill motioned the steward to a chair at his side. "I have a good many questions to ask you," he began, "but Mr. Claghorn is safely out of the way for at least an hour. He will examine every pack of Angel-Backs in the storeroom, and he will find every card marked." The steward waited for him to continue. "In the first place, the membership of this club changes rapidly, doesn't it?"

"What do you mean, sir?"

"New members are elected—old members resign, or become inactive."

"More frequently than I like. Yes, sir."

"At a rough guess, how many members, very active a year ago, are inactive to-day?"

"Twenty, perhaps," said the steward.

"Write their names on a piece of paper."

The man did so.

"Play for high stakes is common here?" pursued Bill.

"It is a rule, sir."

"But not all of the twenty played poker."

"No, sir."

"Scratch out the names of those who played other games. That leaves how many?"

"An even dozen, sir."

"Now let us take another angle. There have been big winners in the club during the past year?"

"Yes, sir. At least eight or ten."

"How many of them did their winning at poker?"

"Five or six."

"Write down their names. Compare the two lists. How many of the big winners—at poker—do you find among the inactive members?"

"Only one, sir."

"That's easy to explain, isn't it? A big winner doesn't become inactive. A big winner sticks to the game just as long as he continues winning."

"Naturally, sir."

"Yet one man who was a big winner—at poker—didn't wait for his luck to change. He stopped coming to the club."

The steward nodded. "That always puzzled me, sir. He played poker, and he had the reputation of being the strongest player that ever sat down to a table in these rooms. He played nearly every night for six months—"

"And then?"

"I never could understand it, sir, but he simply stopped coming."

Bill looked keenly at the other. "Was this man—by some curious coincidence—elected to membership just about a year ago?"

The steward nodded with dawning comprehension. "He was, sir. Mr. Ashley Kendrick was proposed one week after I had purchased the Angel-Backs. The Membership Committee has always been notoriously lax; it's easy to get into the Himalaya. Mr. Kendrick was elected five days after his name had been posted."

"He played poker?"

"Yes, sir."

"With the Angel-Backs?"

"Yes, sir."

"And he won?"

"Invariably, sir."

"Then, six months later, when the cards began to run short, he stopped coming?"

"Oh, no, sir."

"What do you mean?"

"He stopped coming; that part's correct, sir. But at the time we hadn't begun to run short of Angel-Backs."

Bill whistled. "This gets more interesting as we go along!"

"We were using nothing but Angel-Backs at that time; the supply was very plentiful. Mr. Kendrick simply failed to show up one evening—that was all."

"You had his address?"

"Yes, sir, but it was an address which won't help. His address was right here—in care of the Himalaya Club."

"No forwarding address, I suppose?"

"None needed, sir. From the moment he joined until the last evening he spent here Mr. Kendrick never received a letter."

It was at this juncture that Tony Claghorn thrust his exuberant self into the picture. "Bill," he announced, "I've examined the Angel-Backs."

"All of them? So soon?"

"It wasn't necessary to look at more than a card or two from each pack. They're all marked."

He had expected his announcement to produce a sensation. He was disappointed.

"Yes; I expected to hear that," said Bill calmly. "In the meantime, I've been busy."

Tony swallowed his chagrin. "With what result?" he demanded.

"Tony, I've run up a blind alley. I've found out something, but it doesn't help—not a darn bit. I'm stumped. I found the trail getting hotter and hotter, and I followed it. I fetched up against a blank wall."

"If you had allowed me to help you," Tony declared, "that wouldn't have happened."

"Perhaps not. Perhaps not."

"It's not too late now," invited Tony.

Bill grinned ruefully. "All right, Tony. Show me how to lay my hands on a fellow named Ashley Kendrick."

"Ashley Kendrick? Ashley Kendrick? Why, he hasn't been in here for months."

"I know that already."

"I can't tell you how to reach him, but I can put you in touch with his best friend."

"Also a member of this club?"

"He used to be," said Tony. "He's a chap by the name of Venner; a nice chap, but the unluckiest there ever was."

Bill glanced at the steward. "Is his name on your list of inactives?"

"Yes, sir."

"But not on the list of winners?"

"No, sir. As Mr. Claghorn says, Mr. Venner was—unfortunate."

Bill sucked in his breath sharply. "I wonder . . . I wonder . . . if by any chance his misfortunes began about the time that the Angel-Backs started to run short."

The steward started. "Come to think of it, they did, sir."

Bill leaped to his feet and flung his arms above his head with excitement unusual for him. "What a fool I was! What a dunderhead! What a numbskull! I should have seen it at once! I should have guessed it right off! Why, it's as plain as the nose on a man's face!"

Tony neither understood nor shared his enthusiasm. "I don't see what you're driving at."

"Don't you see how Venner explains everything?"

Tony fixed a look of mild reproach upon him. "Bill," he cautioned, "don't let me hear you say a word against Venner! He's as fine a fellow as there ever was—even if his luck turned—and I don't see how he explains anything."

By a superhuman effort Bill composed his face, and seated himself again. "Sorry, Tony. Perhaps I was too enthusiastic. But tell me about Venner; tell me all about him."

Tony stood on his dignity. "I don't see what Venner has to do with this case."

"All right, you don't see," said Bill, controlling his impatience with difficulty, "but tell me what I want to know, anyhow."

Tony had acknowledged his friend's authority too long to shake it off easily. "If you insist——"

"I do."

"Then I'll tell you; though I warn you in advance that it won't help you at all." He bent a searching look on the steward. "This must go no further," he warned. "This is to remain a secret among the three of us."

"I shan't say a word, sir. But if you'd prefer to have me go away——"

Magnanimously Tony shook his head.

"Inasmuch as I suspected you, you have a right to listen." He turned to Parmelee. "Bill," he began, "Venner joined the club something less than a year ago—a fine fellow—a gentleman, every inch of him."

"Go on."

"He played poker. I played with him myself any number of times. He rarely played for high stakes—that is, in the beginning. He played a fair game—broke a little better than even. Then, to his misfortune, he met Kendrick.

"Of course, I needn't tell you about Kendrick, one of the best poker players I ever saw; a man who could almost read your mind; who always played in the biggest game, and kicked because it wasn't bigger. Venner met Kendrick, and was fascinated by him. He gave up playing himself to watch Kendrick play: he said he had never seen anything so wonderful. And Kendrick used to like it; Kendrick always saved a chair near him for Venner.

"The two came to be close friends. You'd never see one without the other. Kendrick seemed to like teaching Venner; and Venner's eyes never left Kendrick. And when the game broke up they'd go away together. Kendrick used to live here in the club. For a time, I believe, Venner shared Kendrick's rooms.

"Then, one night Kendrick didn't show up, and Venner acted as if he had lost the best friend he had in the world. He hovered round the table at which Kendrick used to play; he kept his eyes on the door as if Kendrick might come through it any minute; he asked every man he met if he had seen Kendrick.

"For a week Venner watched. He told more than one of us that he suspected Kendrick had met with foul play. Then he gave him up for lost."

Parmelee's eyes were fixed on vacancy.

"It was then that Venner took Kendrick's place in the game—the big game?"

"Yes, it was an asinine thing to do, but Venner thought he had learnt enough from Kendrick to fill his boots. He did—for a night or so. He won—won heavily—and then his luck turned. He'd win one evening. He'd lose twice as much the next. He'd win a thousand—and lose three. He'd win two thousand—and lose five.

"I urged him to stop. I urged him any number of times, but he always explained that out of ordinary courtesy he couldn't. He had won from the other fellows. He had to do the fair thing by giving them a chance for revenge."

Tony paused and nodded gravely.

"That's what Venner did: a chivalrous, gentlemanly, insane performance. Don't you think so?"

Bill turned to the steward. "What do you think?" he enquired.

"After twenty-eight years in the employ of this club I have learnt that there are times when it is wiser not to think."

Bill nodded. "I can understand how you lasted twenty-eight years." He turned to Tony. "Finish your story."

Tony lowered his voice. "I'm coming to the part I want kept secret. Venner lost. Venner lost every cent he had. Venner had to stop coming to the club. He was posted for non-payment of dues."

"Where is he now? And what is he doing?"

"Never tell a soul, will you? Venner's down and out. He's had to take a job as a waiter in a cheap restaurant, and I have to ruin my digestion by having a meal there every once in so often."

Parmelee grinned and cast a grateful glance at his friend. "Tony, you've helped! You have no idea how you've helped!" He rose and deliberately winked at the steward. "Are you good at riddles?"

"What's the riddle, sir?"

"This is a hard one. See if you can guess it." Gravely he propounded: "If a farmer, twenty-five years old, lives in Connecticut, goes to New York on the midday train, spends the afternoon at the Himalaya Club and then, because he has a cast-iron digestion, has his dinner at a cheap restaurant, what—what is the waiter's name?"

"Venner sir," said the steward promptly.

"Go to the head of the class," said Bill.

7

While Parmelee and his much-mystified friend proceed to a frowsy, second-class eating place on lower Eighth Avenue, there to be served by one Venner, there to corral the said Venner in an untidy, private dining-room, there to tempt the said Venner with promises of immunity and gradually increasing amount of currency until his silent tongue becomes exceedingly loquacious, let us turn back the pages of time two years to the very beginning of an exceedingly strange story.

The day was unbearably hot and sultry. Layers of heated air, writhing and twisting like heavy oil in their ascent, floated lazily upwards from the broiling streets. The asphalt itself was soft and gummy; choking dust, the accumulation of a rainless week, lay in ambush to take suffering humanity by the throat; and in innumerable windows sickly geraniums drooped and wilted under the merciless rays of the sun.

A thermometer, hung at street level, would have indicated a temperature well into the nineties. The same thermometer, carried up five flights of stairs in any one of the nearby tenements would gradually have registered higher and higher figures, until, under the metallic roof, assailed from above by the burning glare of the sun, and from below by the out-pour of scorching air, it would actually have indicated a temperature in excess of one hundred. Yet the man who bent

over a little table in the inferno known as a hall bedroom, in the topmost storey of one of the most dilapidated buildings in the section, was too intent upon his labours to notice such minor matters as the weather.

His single window was closed, its inside covered with soap, so that no observer across the street might peer through it. His door was locked—not merely locked, but barricaded by pieces of furniture which had been moved against it. And, despite the heat, for not a breath of air travelled through the room, a kettle, placed on a portable oil-stove, boiled briskly at the man's elbow.

On the table before which he sat, paper cartons—dozens and scores of them—were stacked in orderly fashion until they reached the ceiling. At his right-hand was a saucer containing a reddish liquid with an alcoholic odour. At his left-hand was a second saucer containing a bluish liquid. Half a dozen minute camel's-hair brushes were carefully ranged before him. And, as if the weather and the stove and the tightly closed openings had not made the room hot enough, a high-powered electric light was suspended from a cord, casting a blinding glare upon the man's hands, and upon the objects which were engrossing his attention.

He rose, removed a carton from the huge pile, and, holding it dexterously, allowed the steam from the boiling kettle to hiss upon the paper seal. The carton flew open. With delicate care he set it upon the floor and emptied it of its contents: an even gross of individually sealed small paper boxes. Each seal in turn was held for an instant in the jet of escaping steam; each gave way almost instantly.

The man placed the open boxes on one side, seated himself again, and, wiping his hands carefully so that no moisture from them might make a mark, shook one of the boxes, and removed from it a new pack of playing-cards. He spread them out on the table, took up one of his brushes, dipped it in the coloured liquid, and, with the expertness gained by long practice, placed a microscopic dot on the back of each card.

Had an observer been present he would have noted that the colour applied matched the back of the card perfectly; stranger yet, he would have noted that after the minute spot of moisture had dried the closest scrutiny would have been required to show that the card had been tampered with. While moist, the tiny speck of liquid was visible; when dry, it blended with the surrounding colour so excellently that no person unacquainted with the secret would have been able to discover a mark.

During his manipulations the man had been careful not to disturb the order of the cards: factory-packed playing-cards are always arranged in the same manner. He examined six or eight cards closely, satisfied himself that the marks which he had made were indistinguishable, levelled the pack, and returned it to its box. For a second time he held the seal in the jet of steam. Then he closed the flap, pressed the seal so that it adhered again, and laid the box to one side.

A dozen cartons under the table represented the labour of several weeks. Working at the greatest speed which he would permit himself, his output did not exceed ten packs an hour—and each carton contained a gross of packs—and the huge pile before him numbered at least several hundred cartons. Had he

paused to calculate he might well have been terrified at the result: ten packs an hour; eighty to a hundred a day; at the very best, not more than five gross a week. And nearly a year would elapse before he might reach the completion of his gigantic task.

Presumably, the man had made his calculations before commencing; had estimated the expenditure of time, and had decided that it was worth his while, for he paused not an instant upon finishing one pack before beginning on another. He worked rapidly yet carefully, with a concentration which might have been explained only had a slave-driver, with a whip, been standing behind him. Practice had brought him surprising skill. There was no waste motion; no misdirected energy. Little by little the pile of unfinished work diminished; little by little the pile of finished work grew.

At seven o'clock, or thereabouts, he extinguished the oil-stove, drew a clean white sheet over the mountain of cartons, washed, and made himself presentable, and went out, padlocking the door of his room behind him. Other tenants of the building, gathered at the entrance for a breath of air, nodded to him as he strode by them. "Good evening, Mr. Kendrick," they chorused.

"Good evening," said Kendrick, and went on his way—to a lunch-room round the corner.

"What's he do for a living?" enquired one of the neighbours.

"He's a literary man," said one better informed.

"A which?"

"A literary man. He writes novels and books and stories. Locks himself in his room from morning till night, and writes—just writes. He told me so himself. Keeps regular hours, just like a working man, too."

"That ain't work—just writing," commented a listener, and broke off to enquire. "Have you ever read anything he's wrote?"

"Not yet. He says there'll be nothing of his published for a year. But he's going to let me know when something comes out."

Let us dive headlong for the end of that year. The pile of unfinished work had shrunk—finally vanished. The little room was filled with neatly stacked cartons, which one might have examined and sworn had never been opened. And the International Supply Company—alias Kendrick—having offered samples of superior quality playing-cards at ruinous prices to three clubs, equally notorious for the size of the games played under their roofs, and for the ease with which a stranger might secure membership, had arranged to sell the entire quantity to the Himalaya.

The following day a horse-drawn truck, specially hired for the occasion, and personally driven by the International Supply Company—alias Kendrick—delivered several hundred gross of marked cards to the Himalaya Club.

Within a week Mr. Ashley Kendrick was proposed for membership in that notorious organisation.

He was elected five days later.

Within less than a month he was voted the best poker-player who had ever seated himself at one of the Himalaya's card-tables, and his former neighbours,

who had looked forward to reading his books, novels, and stories, waited a while —and then forgot him.

8

A gambler's paradise: a place where the play is continuous, where the stakes are high, where the players are liberal, and where every card is marked. It was in such an unbelievably blissful spot that Kendrick now found himself. For a whole year he had worked and planned; for a whole year he had lived economically on his savings; if he was at length to be rewarded, he felt that he deserved it.

Yet he did not make the mistake of playing too well. An infallible player discourages his opponents, whereas an occasional loss is not expensive, and greatly heartens the victim. Kendrick, who knew every card in the pack, who could read his opponents' hands as readily as if they had been exposed, who could tell every time whether or not it was worth while to draw, could have won far more than he actually permitted himself to. Hardly an evening went by without Kendrick sustaining at least one sensational loss; hardly a session without his going down to defeat on at least one well-advertised hand. But never did the gambler rise from his seat poorer than when he had settled himself into it; never did the end of a session make it necessary for Kendrick to produce his cheque-book.

He limited himself strictly to a maximum winning, and his self-control was such that he never exceeded the fixed amount. Yet the maximum was a liberal maximum, for at the end of ten days he had recouped himself for the expenditure of the preceding year, and at the end of three months his bank account had begun to assume formidable proportions.

At the end of four months he increased his maximum liberally, and doubled his bank account, and at the end of five months he began to fling off all restraint. He began to play poker of a brand unheard of even at the Himalaya, where fine players abounded. He had put by a gigantic nest-egg; and it was his programme to win as much as possible against the day when the Angel-Backs would begin to run short.

It was at this juncture that Venner, so he confessed to Parmelee, projected himself into the situation.

Venner, a shiftless ne'er-do-well of pleasing personality, had dissipated a modest inheritance, and was fast nearing the end of his slender resources. He played poker tolerably; upon occasion he had not hesitated to cheat, and, in the hope of extending his dishonest operations enough to make a killing, he had purchased half a dozen packs of cards at the club, and had taken them home with him with the laudable intention of marking them. Once marked, he would find opportunities to substitute them for the club's cards.

He had marked two or three packs before he made the astounding discovery that the cards were already marked. He could not believe the evidence of his eyes. Feverishly he broke open the sealed boxes, to find that some pioneer in knavery had been before him. More cards, covertly examined at the Himalaya itself, confirmed the amazing truth.

Venner had intended to indulge in cheating on a small scale. His discovery of the existence of a swindle of such gigantic dimensions left him simply thunderstruck. For an instant he reflected that, knowing the secret, he, too, could win as he pleased. But upon second thought it occurred to him that there would be quite as much gain, and far less risk, were he to make a cat's-paw of the daring sharper who was doubtless at work this instant.

For months Kendrick had been a sensational winner. Within twenty-four hours after penetrating his secret Venner confronted him.

"You can't prove anything," Kendrick said.

"I know it," said Venner.

"I'm the most surprised man in the world to learn that the cards are marked," Kendrick alleged.

"Then you won't object if I pass the word on to the other members, and see that other cards are used?"

Kendrick's eyes narrowed. Venner was easy for him to see through. "What's the alternative?" he demanded.

"Divvy up with me," murmured Venner. "Pay me half of whatever you win, and I'll be silent as the grave."

He paused. "If you don't, I'll expose you. I'll say that you confessed everything—"

"Nobody will believe it."

"If that's what you think, turn down my offer."

Kendrick was in an unpleasant position, and was fully aware of it. The solution —the solution that flashed upon him at once—was to pretend to accept Venner's terms, and to disappear for ever from the scene. But the weak point was painfully obvious: Venner, out of spite, might set the authorities upon his trail. It would be better, Kendrick decided instantaneously, to wait until Venner, too, was thoroughly besmirched; to make Venner an accomplice who dared not open his mouth without imperilling his own freedom. And then, also, even if he had to divide his future winnings, a great deal of money might be amassed in a short time—say, two or three weeks.

He shook Venner's hand heartily.

"You're a man after my own heart," he said. "I accept your proposition."

Then began the short but interesting period during which Venner, according to Tony's description, sat at Kendrick's side and ostensibly studied his game, but during which Venner, according to his own confession, followed the play with an eagle eye to make sure that his partner in crime did not win more than he would admit, and thus defraud him of his share.

After a few days Venner invited himself to live in Kendrick's rooms; he could keep a closer watch on him in that manner, and for two brief but happy weeks Venner's income was exceedingly large. He treated himself to a new outfit of clothing, and began to sport small but costly scarfpins. He even looked at automobiles; his improved circumstances would warrant him in purchasing one.

Then, upon the evening of the day that Venner, after convening himself in executive session, had voted that Kendrick should henceforth pay him three-

quarters and not merely half of his winnings, the astute gambler disappeared. Venner was worried; honestly believed that his partner had met with foul play. At the end of a week a letter, mailed en route to Mexico City, told Venner the truth. Kendrick had disappeared for good. He had won enough to support him in comfort the rest of his life. He did not propose to share his winnings, even with so likeable a chap as Venner. Nevertheless, he gave Venner his blessing, and mentioned that he admired Venner's collection of scarfpins, which he had taken to Mexico with him.

At once Venner found himself in straitened circumstances. His income had vanished; his expenditure continued. But the Angel-Backs promised relief.

He took Kendrick's place in the big game, and won heavily for two nights. On the third night, to his unutterable horror, cards of a strange pattern were used, and Venner, compelled to play honest poker against men who qualified as experts, lost more than he had won the two preceding sessions.

On the fourth night the Angel-Backs returned, and Venner did well. But on the fifth and sixth nights other cards were supplied and the results were harrowing.

What followed partook of the nature of a nightmare. Venner had run into debt; willing or unwilling, was compelled to play. And he was suddenly confronted with a situation far more dangerous than any that had ever faced Kendrick: the Angel-Backs were running short, other cards were being substituted, and, if Venner invariably won with the Angel-Backs and lost upon all other occasions, it would not be long before some astute observer called attention to the circumstance.

He used to lie awake at night, summoning up hideous pictures, visioning the possibilities. It occurred to him that he might purchase more Angel-Backs, mark them and introduce them into the play. He found that cards of that pattern were not obtainable at any price. Even had they been obtainable, he could not bring them to the table without inviting suspicious comment.

He thought of marking the cards which the club had substituted for the Angel-Backs; but he realised that the sleight-of-hand necessary to exchange them for the pack in use was far beyond him. In his petty cheating in the past he had occasionally indulged in the form of dishonesty known as ringing in a cold pack. That was possible, playing for moderate stakes, with no spectators. It was impossible, save for some sharper far more expert than he, in a big game closely watched by twenty or more men.

For a ghastly week Venner endured the tortures of the damned. Like Kendrick, he found it well to limit his winnings when the gods were good to him, and when chance brought a deck of marked cards to the table. But, unlike Kendrick, he was compelled too often to play with strange cards—and he found it quite impossible to limit his losings.

For all his sins in the past the cheat paid a thousand times over during that week. To put in an appearance each night, smiling and jovial, while his soul writhed in torment; to forego pot after pot when the Angel-Backs offered it to him, because to win too much might create suspicion; to lose upon other nights,

and lose heavily—disastrously—because he dared not change his style of play; no wonder the man cracked under the strain.

He began to play wildly, recklessly. His opponents, shrewd students of psychology, sensed the change in the wind. In two consecutive sessions they stripped him.

Courtesy prohibits a man from taking another's last cigarette, but it does not prohibit a man from taking another's last dollar. His opponents showed him no mercy. When Venner left the Himalaya Club for the last time, he had borrowed as much as his friends would lend, he owned nothing, and his pockets were empty.

This, coming by driblets in the beginning, coming faster and faster as the man's emotions mastered him in the end, was the story that Parmelee and Claghorn heard from the lips of one Venner, a waiter in a frowsy, second-class eating-place on lower Eighth Avenue.

9

It was not until half an hour after they had left the restaurant, on their walk uptown, that Bill opened his mouth. Tony, completely floored, for once in his life, had marched at his side in silence.

"We started, didn't we," said Bill, "to find out whether or not Roy Terriss cheated at bridge? It's funny over what a long trail it has led us! Terriss—the Angel-Backs—the Himalaya—Kendrick—Venner——"

"Don't mention that man's name to me!" interrupted Tony.

"Why not?"

"When I think of what I've been doing to my digestion on his account: eating in that miserable restaurant at least once a week because I sympathised with him! Ugh!"

"Venner is a whole lot worse off, isn't he? You have been a guest of the restaurant; he is a waiter in it."

"Serves him right!"

"Perhaps. Perhaps. Something—call it what you will—has a great way of getting even with the man who doesn't play fair. Venner is paying—Venner is paying heavily. If you're a real man, Tony, you might go on eating a meal in that restaurant once in a while."

"Why?"

"Some day you may be able to set Venner on the right path, and that would be your way of paying whatever you owe. How about it, Tony?"

"Er—I'll think about it."

Bill nodded his approval. "Pay! Pay! Pay! You can't get out of it!"

"No? How about Kendrick?"

"He'll be no exception. Think of the year's slavery he endured before he could bring off his coup! Think what he could have done—where he could have been to-day—had he applied the same energy to any honest pursuit!"

"He's living in luxury, in Mexico."

"Yes, for six months, perhaps."

"He won enough to support him for the rest of his life."

"Lots of gamblers have done that, but somehow the money doesn't last. Money made that way never lasts. Like the angels—the fallen angels—it has wings! An honest man can call on the law to protect his property. Kendrick can't. The moment the others find that out—in Mexico—what chance will he have?" Bill shook his head vigorously. "No, of the two, I think Venner is the lucky one. He's alive, and I'll bet two to one this minute that Kendrick isn't. He worked too hard for his money to give it up alive; and in Mexico life is cheap—very cheap."

"Maybe," said Tony; "maybe." He thought hard for a minute. Then he turned to his friend. "From the very beginning I've never understood why you've been so keenly interested in this affair. What was it? Love of adventure?"

"Not after six years of drifting about the country, old fellow."

"Then what was it?"

Bill permitted himself the luxury of a smile. "As I told you this morning—it seems so long ago, doesn't it?—it was nothing but a friendly desire to save your reputation."

"My reputation," repeated Tony incredulously.

"That was all. You see, after you had exposed Terriss, it occurred to him that you were a pupil of mine, and he came straight to headquarters, with his troubles."

"He went to you?" gasped Tony.

"That is the thought I am trying to convey," Bill assented. "Terriss was innocent. You know that now. He knew it then, and he convinced me like a shot. He wanted to be vindicated, but that wasn't all; he was dead sure that if the cards were marked you had marked them yourself, and he wanted to see you—you and your friends—behind the bars! He is a clever man, a mighty quick-thinking man, and I'm pretty sure that if I hadn't taken the case he'd have turned the tables on you before now!"

Tony's face became purple. "But I'm innocent! You know I'm innocent!"

"Sometimes it's very hard to prove, Tony. Terriss was innocent, but he couldn't make you see it."

Tony swallowed hard. "My friends and I owe Terriss a handsome apology."

"You do!"

"I shall see that it is forthcoming. And, by the way, whatever fee you charge Terriss will be paid by me."

"Fair enough."

"Your expenses, too. Whatever they were. I will reimburse you."

Bill smiled. "Well, you heard me promise Venner a hundred dollars if he'd tell his story."

"I'll pay that."

"When you make out your cheque to Venner, make a mistake and slip in an extra nought before the decimal point."

"Why on earth should I do that?" protested Tony.

"No reason at all," said Bill, "except that I'm sentimental. For a hundred

dollars—a contemptible hundred dollars—Venner turned his soul inside out. I'm going to improve his self-respect by convincing him that his soul is worth at least a thousand."

Tony nodded. "I get your point. The cheque will read a thousand. And now, your fee."

"That will come high."

"I expect that."

"Terriss expected it too, the quick-thinking devil! He insisted on your friends paying up because he wanted plenty of ready money on hand to satisfy me."

Tony smiled. His finances had taken a turn for the better since he had followed his friend's example and had become merely a spectator, and not a participant, in games of chance. His bank account had become plethoric, and the knowledge was pleasant.

"Bill," he said, "you can't frighten me. Name what you want."

"It will come hard."

"If it does, it's worth it."

"All right, Tony, here goes." Bill stretched out his hand. "Pay me fifty-two Angel-Backs—fifty-two marked cards—fifty-two Fallen Angels. I'm going to nail them to the walls of my bedroom as a souvenir!"

Author's Note

The central episode of this story, extraordinary as it is, is founded on facts recounted by the celebrated Robert Houdin.

Bianco, a Spanish sharper, marked an immense number of playing-cards, resealed them in their original boxes, and sold them to clubs in Havana at bargain-counter prices. Following his cards to Cuba, he won large sums of money.

Everything went well until a second sharper, Laforcade, a Frenchman, wishing to mark cards for his own uses, took home a quantity, and, to his astonishment, discovered that they were already marked. Knowing of Bianco's sensational successes, Laforcade quickly satisfied himself that the Spaniard was the guilty man, and, instead of exposing him, invited him to share his winnings.

To this proposal Bianco reluctantly acceded, but, tiring of it after some months, disappeared. Laforcade, left to shift for himself lacked Bianco's expertness, was detected cheating, and was arrested. At his trial it was proved that Laforcade had not marked the cards, and that he had not imported them; it was impossible to prove that he was aware the cards were marked. The prosecution broke down, and Laforcade was acquitted.

In his turn, Laforcade vanished, and neither he nor Bianco was ever heard of again.

P. W.

Victor L. Whitechurch

SIR GILBERT MURRELL'S PICTURE

from THRILLING STORIES OF THE RAILWAY

Pearson, 1912

Permission to reprint is granted by the author

The affair of the goods truck on the Didcot and Newbury branch of the Great Western Railway was of singular interest, and found a prominent place in Thorpe Hazell's note-book. It was owing partly to chance, and partly to Hazell's sagacity, that the main incidents in the story were discovered, but he always declared that the chief interest to his mind was the unique method by which a very daring plan was carried out.

He was staying with a friend at Newbury at the time, and had taken his camera down with him, for he was a bit of an amateur photographer as well as book-lover, though his photos generally consisted of trains and engines. He had just come in from a morning's ramble with his camera slung over his shoulder, and was preparing to partake of two plasmon biscuits, when his friend met him in the hall.

"I say, Hazell," he began, "you're just the fellow they want here."

"What's up?" asked Hazell, taking off his camera and commencing some "exercises."

"I've just been down to the station. I know the station-master very well, and he tells me an awfully queer thing happened on the line last night."

"Where?"

"On the Didcot branch. It's a single line, you know, running through the Berkshire Downs to Didcot."

Hazell smiled, and went on whirling his arms round his head.

"Kind of you to give me the information," he said, "but I happen to know the line. But what's occurred?"

"Well, it appears a goods-train left Didcot last night bound through to Winchester, and that one of the waggons never arrived here at Newbury."

"Not very much in that," replied Hazell, still at his "exercises," "unless the waggon in question was behind the brake and the couplings snapped, in which case the next train along might have run into it."

"Oh, no. The waggon was in the middle of the train."

"Probably left in a siding by mistake," replied Hazell.

"But the station-master says that all the stations along the line have been wired to, and that it isn't at any of them."

"Very likely it never left Didcot."

"He declares there is no doubt about that."

"Well, you begin to interest me," replied Hazell, stopping his whirligigs and beginning to eat his plasmon. "There may be something in it, though very often a waggon is mislaid. But I'll go down to the station."

"I'll go with you, Hazell, and introduce you to the station-master. He has heard of your reputation."

Ten minutes later they were in the station-master's office, Hazell having reslung his camera.

"Very glad to meet you," said that functionary, "for this affair promises to be mysterious. *I* can't make it out at all."

"Do you know what the truck contained?"

"That's just where the bother comes in, sir. It was valuable property. There's a loan exhibition of pictures at Winchester next week, and this waggon was bringing down some of them from Leamington. They belong to Sir Gilbert Murrell—three of them, I believe—large pictures, and each in a separate packing-case."

"H'm—this sounds very funny. Are you *sure* the truck was on the train?"

"Simpson, the brakesman, is here now, and I'll send for him. Then you can hear the story in his own words."

So the goods-guard appeared on the scene. Hazell looked at him narrowly, but there was nothing suspicious in his honest face.

"I know the waggon was on the train when we left Didcot," he said in answer to enquiries, "and I noticed it at Upton, the next station, where we took a couple off. It was the fifth or sixth in front of my brake. I'm quite certain of that. We stopped at Compton to take up a cattle-truck, but I didn't get out there. Then we ran right through to Newbury, without stopping at the other stations, and then I discovered that the waggon was not on the train. I thought very likely it might have been left at Upton or Compton by mistake, but I was wrong, for they say it isn't there. That's all I know about it, sir. A rum go, ain't it?"

"Extraordinary!" exclaimed Hazell. "You must have made a mistake."

"No, sir, I'm sure I haven't."

"Did the driver of the train notice anything?"

"No, sir."

"Well, but the thing's impossible," said Hazell. "A loaded waggon couldn't have been spirited away. What time was it when you left Didcot?"

"About eight o'clock, sir."

"Ah!—quite dark. You noticed nothing along the line?"

"Nothing, sir."

"You were in your brake all the time, I suppose?"

"Yes, sir—while we were running."

At this moment there came a knock at the station-master's door and a porter entered.

"There's a passenger train just in from the Didcot branch," said the man,

"and the driver reports that he saw a truck loaded with packing-cases in Churn siding."

"Well, I'm blowed!" exclaimed the brakesman. "Why, we ran through Churn without a stop—trains never do stop there except in camp time."

"Where is Churn?" asked Hazell, for once at a loss.

"It's merely a platform and a siding close to the camping ground between Upton and Compton," replied the station-master, "for the convenience of troops only, and very rarely used, except in the summer, when soldiers are encamped there."

"I should very much like to see the place, and as soon as possible," said Hazell.

"So you shall," replied the station-master. "A train will soon start on the branch. Inspector Hill shall go with you, and instruction shall be given to the driver to stop there, while a return train can pick you both up."

In less than an hour Hazell and Inspector Hill alighted at Churn. It is a lonely enough place, situated in a vast, flat basin of the Downs, scarcely relieved by a single tree, and far from all human habitation, with the exception of a lonely shepherd's cottage some half a mile away.

The "station" itself is only a single platform, with a shelter and a solitary siding, terminating in what is known in railway language as a "dead end"—that is, in this case, wooden buffers to stop any trucks. This siding runs off from the single line of rail at points from the Didcot direction of the line.

And in this siding was the lost truck, right against the "dead end," filled with three packing-cases, and labelled "Leamington to Winchester, via Newbury." There could be no doubt about it at all. But how it had got there from the middle of a train running through without a stop was a mystery even to the acute mind of Thorpe Hazell.

"Well," said the Inspector, when they had gazed long enough at the truck, "we'd better have a look at the points. Come along."

There is not even a signal-box at this primitive station. The points are actuated by two levers in a ground frame, standing close by the side of the line, one lever unlocking and the other shifting the same points.

"How about these points?" said Hazell as they drew near. "You only use them so occasionally that I suppose they are kept out of action?"

"Certainly," replied the inspector. "A block of wood is bolted down between the end of the point rail and the main rail, fixed as a wedge—ah! there it is, you see, quite untouched; and the levers themselves are locked—here's the keyhole in the ground frame. This is the strangest thing I've ever come across, Mr. Hazell."

Thorpe Hazell stood looking at the points and levers, sorely puzzled. They *must* have been worked to get that truck in the siding, he knew well. But how?

Suddenly his face lit up. Oil evidently had been used to loosen the nut of the bolt that fixed the wedge of wood. Then his eyes fell on the handle of one of the two levers, and a slight exclamation of joy escaped him.

"Look," said the inspector at that moment, "it's impossible to pull them off,"

and he stretched out his hand towards a lever. To his astonishment Hazell seized him by the collar and dragged him back before he could touch it.

"I beg your pardon," he exclaimed, "hope I've not hurt you, but I want to photograph those levers first, if you don't mind."

The inspector watched him rather sullenly as he fixed his camera on a folding tripod stand he had with him, only a few inches from the handle of one of the levers, and took two very careful photographs of it.

"Can't see the use of that, sir," growled the inspector. But Hazell vouchsafed no reply.

"Let him find it out for himself," he thought.

Then he said aloud:

"I fancy they must have had that block out, inspector—and it's evident the points must have been set to get the truck where it is. How it was done is a problem, but, if the doer of it was anything of a regular criminal, I think we might find *him*."

"How?" asked the puzzled inspector.

"Ah," was the response, "I'd rather not say at present. Now, I should very much like to know whether those pictures are intact?"

"We shall soon find that out," replied the inspector, "for we'll take the truck back with us." And he commenced undoing the bolt with a spanner, after which he unlocked the levers.

"H'm—they work pretty freely," he remarked as he pulled one.

"Quite so," said Hazell, "they've been oiled recently."

There was an hour or so before the return train would pass, and Hazell occupied it by walking to the shepherd's cottage.

"I am hungry," he explained to the woman there, "and hunger is Nature's dictate for food. Can you oblige me with a couple of onions and a broomstick?"

And she talks to-day of the strange man who "kept a swingin' o' that there broomstick round 'is 'ead and then eat them onions as solemn as a judge."

The first thing Hazell did on returning to Newbury was to develop his photographs. The plates were dry enough by the evening for him to print one or two photos on gaslight-paper and to enclose the clearest of them with a letter to a Scotland Yard official whom he knew, stating that he would call for an answer, as he intended returning to town in a couple of days. The following evening he received a note from the station-master, which read:

"Dear Sir,—I promised to let you know if the pictures in the cases on that truck were in any way tampered with. I have just received a report from Winchester by which I understand that they have been unpacked and carefully examined by the Committee of the Loan Exhibition. The Committee are perfectly satisfied that they have not been damaged or interfered with in any way, and that they have been received just as they left the owner's hands.

"We are still at a loss to account for the running of the waggon on to Churn siding or for the object in doing so. An official has been down from

Paddington, and, at his request, we are not making the affair public—the goods having arrived in safety. I am sure you will observe confidence in this matter."

"More mysterious than ever," said Hazell to himself, "I can't understand it at all."

The next day he called at Scotland Yard and saw the official.

"I've had no difficulty with your little matter, you'll be glad to hear," he said. "We looked up our records and very soon spotted your man."

"Who is he?"

"His real name is Edgar Jeffreys, but we know him under several aliases. He's served four sentences for burglary and robbery—the latter a daring theft from a train, so he's in your line, Mr. Hazell. What's he been up to, and how did you get that print?"

"Well," replied Hazell, "I don't quite know yet what he's been doing. But I should like to be able to find him if anything turns up. Never mind how I got the print—the affair is quite a private one at present, and nothing may come of it."

The official wrote an address on a bit of paper and handed it to Hazell.

"He's living there just now, under the name of Allen. We keep such men in sight, and I'll let you know if he moves."

When Hazell opened his paper the following morning he gave a cry of joy. And no wonder, for this is what he saw:

"Mystery of a Picture

"*Sir Gilbert Murrell and the Winchester Loan Exhibition*

"*An Extraordinary Charge*

"The Committee of the Loan Exhibition of Pictures to be opened next week at Winchester are in a state of very natural excitement brought about by a strange charge that has been made against them by Sir Gilbert Murrell.

"Sir Gilbert, who lives at Leamington, is the owner of several very valuable pictures, among them being the celebrated 'Holy Family,' by Velazquez. This picture, with two others, was despatched by him from Leamington to be exhibited at Winchester, and yesterday he journeyed to that city in order to make himself satisfied with the hanging arrangements, as he had particularly stipulated that 'The Holy Family' was to be placed in a prominent position.

"The picture in question was standing on the floor of the gallery, leaning against a pillar, when Sir Gilbert arrived with some representatives of the Committee.

"Nothing occurred till he happened to walk behind the canvas, when he astounded those present by saying that the picture was not his at all, declaring that a copy had been substituted, and stating that he was absolutely certain on account of certain private marks of his at the back of the canvas, which were quite indecipherable, and which were now missing. He admitted

that the painting itself in every way resembled his picture, and that it was the cleverest forgery he had ever seen; but a very painful scene took place, the Hanging Committee stating that the picture had been received by them from the railway company just as it stood.

"At present the whole affair is a mystery, but Sir Gilbert insisted most emphatically to our correspondent, who was able to see him, that the picture was certainly not his, and said that, as the original is extremely valuable, he intends holding the Committee responsible for the substitution which, he declares, has taken place."

It was evident to Hazell that the papers had not, as yet, got hold of the mysterious incident at Churn. As a matter of fact, the railway company had kept that affair strictly to themselves, and the Loan Committee knew nothing of what had happened on the line.

But Hazell saw that enquiries would be made, and determined to probe the mystery without delay. He saw at once that if there was any truth in Sir Gilbert's story the substitution had taken place in that lonely siding at Churn. He was staying at his London flat, and five minutes after he had read the paragraph had called a hansom and was being hurried off to a friend of his who was well known in art circles as a critic and art historian.

"I can tell you exactly what you want to know," said he, "for I've only just been looking it up, so as to have an article in the evening papers on it. There was a famous copy of the picture of Velazquez, said to have been painted by a pupil of his, and for some years there was quite a controversy among the respective owners as to which was the genuine one—just as there is to-day about a Madonna belonging to a gentleman at St. Moritz, but which a Vienna gallery also claims to possess.

"However, in the case of 'The Holy Family,' the dispute was ultimately settled once and for all years ago, and, undoubtedly, Sir Gilbert Murrell held the genuine picture. What became of the copy no one knows. For twenty years all trace of it has been lost. There—that's all I can tell you. I shall pad it out a bit in my article, and I must get to work on it at once. Good-bye!"

"One moment—where was the copy last seen?"

"Oh! the old Earl of Ringmere had it last, but when he knew it to be a forgery he is said to have sold it for a mere song, all interest in it being lost, you see."

"Let me see, he's a very old man, isn't he?"

"Yes—nearly eighty—a perfect enthusiast on pictures still, though."

"Only *said* to have sold it," muttered Hazell to himself, as he left the house; "that's very vague—and there's no knowing what these enthusiasts will do when they're really bent on a thing. Sometimes they lose all sense of honesty. I've known fellows actually rob a friend's collection of stamps or butterflies. What if there's something in it? By George, what an awful scandal there would be! It seems to me that if such a scandal were prevented I'd be thanked all round. Anyhow, I'll have a shot at it on spec. And I *must* find out how that truck was run off the line."

When once Hazell was on the track of a railway mystery he never let a moment slip by. In an hour's time, he was at the address given him at Scotland Yard. On his way there he took a card from his case—a blank one—and wrote on it, "From the Earl of Ringmere." This he put into an envelope.

"It's a bold stroke," he said to himself, "but, if there's anything in it, it's worth trying."

So he asked for Allen. The woman who opened the door looked at him suspiciously, and said she didn't think Mr. Allen was in.

"Give him this envelope," replied Hazell. In a couple of minutes she returned, and asked him to follow her.

A short, wiry-looking man, with sharp, evil-looking eyes, stood in the room waiting for him and looking at him suspiciously.

"Well," he snapped, "what is it—what do you want?"

"I come on behalf of the Earl of Ringmere. You will know that when I mention Churn," replied Hazell, playing his trump card boldly.

"Well," went on the man, "what about that?"

Hazell wheeled round, locked the door suddenly, put the key in his pocket, and then faced his man. The latter darted forward, but Hazell had a revolver pointing at him in a twinkling.

"You—detective!"

"No, I'm not—I told you I came on behalf of the Earl—that looks like hunting up matters for his sake, doesn't it?"

"What does the old fool mean?" asked Jeffreys.

"Oh! I see you know all about it. Now, listen to me quietly, and you may come to a little reason. You changed that picture at Churn the other night."

"You seem to know a lot about it," sneered the other, but less defiantly.

"Well, I do—but not quite all. You were foolish to leave your traces on that lever, eh?"

"How did I do that?" exclaimed the man, giving himself away.

"You'd been dabbling about with oil, you see, and you left your thumb-print on the handle. I photographed it, and they recognised it at Scotland Yard. Quite simple."

Jeffreys swore beneath his breath.

"I wish you'd tell me what you mean," he said.

"Certainly. I expect you've been well paid for this little job."

"If I have, I'm not going to take any risks. I told the old man so. He's worse than I am—he put me up to getting the picture. Let him take his chance when it comes out. I suppose he wants to keep his name out of it—that's why you're here."

"You're not quite right. Now, just listen to me. You're a villain, and you deserve to suffer; but I'm acting in a purely private capacity, and I fancy if I can get the original picture back to its owner that it will be better for all parties to hush this affair up. Has the old Earl got it?"

"No, not yet," admitted the other, "he was too artful. But he knows where it is, and so do I."

"Ah—now you're talking sense! Look here! You make a clean breast of it, and I'll take it down on paper. You shall swear to the truth of your statement before a commissioner for oaths—he need not see the actual confession. I shall hold this in case it is necessary; but, if you help me to get the picture back to Sir Gilbert, I don't think it will be."

After a little more conversation, Jeffreys explained. Before he did so, however, Hazell had taken a bottle of milk and a hunch of wholemeal bread from his pocket, and calmly proceeded to perform "exercises" and then to eat his "lunch" while Jeffreys told the following story:

"It was the old Earl who did it. How he got hold of me doesn't matter; perhaps I got hold of him—maybe I put him up to it—but that's not the question. He'd kept that forged picture of his in a lumber room for years, but he always had his eye on the genuine one. He paid a long price for the forgery, and he got to think that *he ought* to have the original. But there, he's mad on pictures.

"Well, as I say, he kept the forgery out of sight and let folk think he'd sold it, but all the time he was in hopes of getting it changed somehow for the original.

"Then I came along and undertook the job for him. There were three of us in it, for it was a ticklish business. We found out by what train the picture was to travel—that was easy enough. I got hold of a key to unlock that ground frame, and the screwing off of the bolt was a mere nothing. I oiled the points well so that the thing should work as I wanted it to.

"One pal was with me—in the siding, ready to clap on the side-brake when the truck was running in. I was to work the points, and my other pal, who had the most awkward job of all, was on the goods train—under a tarpaulin in a truck. He had two lengths of very stout rope with a hook at each end of them.

"When the train left Upton, he started his job. Goods trains travel very slowly, and there was plenty of time. Counting from the back brake-van, the truck we wanted to run off was No. 5. First he hooked No. 4 truck to No. 6, fixing the hook at the side of the end of both trucks, and having the slack in his hand, coiled up.

"Then, when the train ran down a bit of a decline, he uncoupled No. 5 from No. 4, standing on No. 5 to do it. That was easy enough, for he'd taken a coupling staff with him; then he paid out the slack till it was tight. Next he hooked the second rope from No. 5 to No. 6, uncoupled No. 5 from No. 6, and paid out the slack of the second rope.

"Now you can see what happened. The last few trucks of the train were being drawn by a long rope reaching from No. 4 to No. 6, and leaving a space in between. In the middle of this space No. 5 ran, drawn by a short rope from No. 6. My pal stood on No. 6, with a sharp knife in his hand.

"The rest was easy. I held the lever, close by the side of the line, coming forward to it as soon as the engine passed. The instant the space appeared after No. 6 I pulled it over, and No. 5 took the siding points, while my pal cut the rope at the same moment.

"Directly the truck had run by and off I reversed the lever so that the rest of the train following took the main line. There is a decline before Compton, and

the last four trucks came running down to the main body of the train, while my pal hauled in the slack and finally coupled No. 4 to No. 6 when they came together. He jumped from the train as it ran very slowly into Compton. That's how it was done."

Hazell's eyes sparkled.

"It's the cleverest thing I've heard of on the line," he said.

"Think so? Well, it wanted some handling. The next thing was to unscrew the packing-case, take the picture out of the frame and put the forgery we'd brought with us in its place. That took us some time, but there was no fear of interruption in that lonely part. Then I took the picture off—rolling it up first—and hid it. The old Earl insisted on this. I was to tell him where it was, then he was going to wait for a few weeks and get it himself."

"Where did you hide it?"

"You're sure you're going to hush this up?"

"You'd have been in charge long ago if I were not."

"Well, there's a path from Churn to East Ilsley across the downs, and on the right hand of that path is an old sheep well—quite dry. It's down there. You can easily find the string if you look for it—fixed near the top."

Hazell took down the man's confession, which was duly attested. His conscience told him that perhaps he ought to have taken stronger measures.

. . . . . .

"I told you I was merely a private individual," said Hazell to Sir Gilbert Murrell. "I have acted in a purely private capacity in bringing you your picture."

Sir Gilbert looked from the canvas to the calm face of Hazell.

"Who are you, sir?" he asked.

"Well, I rather aspire to be a book-collector; you may have read my little monograph on *Jacobean Bindings?*"

"No," said Sir Gilbert, "I have not had that pleasure. But I must enquire further into this. How did you get this picture? Where was it—who—?"

"Sir Gilbert," broke in Hazell, "I could tell you the whole truth, of course. I am not in any way to blame myself. By chance, as much as anything else, I discovered how your picture had been stolen and where it was."

"But I want to know all about it. I shall prosecute—I—"

"I think not. Now, do you remember where the forged picture was seen last?"

"Yes; the Earl of Ringmere had it—he sold it."

"Did he?"

"Eh?"

"What if he kept it all this time?" said Hazell, with a peculiar look.

There was a long silence.

"Good heavens!" exclaimed Sir Gilbert at length. "You don't mean *that*. Why, he has one foot in the grave—a very old man—I was dining with him only a fortnight ago."

"Ah! Well, I think you are content now, Sir Gilbert?"

"It is terrible—terrible! I have the picture back, but I wouldn't have the scandal known for worlds."

"It never need be," replied Hazell. "You will make it all right with the Winchester people?"

"Yes—yes—even if I have to admit I was mistaken, and let the forgery stay through the exhibition."

"I think that would be the best way," replied Hazell, who never regretted his action.

"Of course, Jeffreys ought to have been punished," he said to himself; "but it was a clever idea—a clever idea."

"May I offer you some lunch?" asked Sir Gilbert.

"Thank you; but I am a vegetarian, and—"

"I think my cook could arrange something; let me ring."

"It is very good of you, but I ordered a dish of lentils and a salad at the station restaurant. But if you will allow me just to go through my physical training anteluncheon exercises here, it would save me the trouble of a more or less public display at the station."

"Certainly," replied the rather bewildered baronet; whereupon Hazell threw off his coat and commenced whirling his arms like a windmill.

"Digestion should be considered *before* a meal," he explained.

G. K. Chesterton

THE HAMMER OF GOD

from The Innocence of Father Brown

Dodd, Mead and Company

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The little village of Bohun Beacon was perched on a hill so steep that the tall spire of its church seemed only like the peak of a small mountain. At the foot of the church stood a smithy, generally red with fires and always littered with hammers and scraps of iron; opposite to this, over a rude cross of cobbled paths, was "The Blue Boar," the only inn of the place. It was upon this crossway, in the lifting of a leaden and silver daybreak, that two brothers met in the street and spoke; though one was beginning the day and the other finishing it. The Rev. and Hon. Wilfred Bohun was very devout, and was making his way to some austere exercises of prayer or contemplation at dawn. Colonel the Hon. Norman Bohun, his elder brother, was by no means devout, and was sitting in evening dress on the bench outside "The Blue Boar," drinking what the philosophic ob-

server was free to regard either as his last glass on Tuesday or his first on Wednesday. The colonel was not particular.

The Bohuns were one of the very few aristocratic families really dating from the Middle Ages, and their pennon had actually seen Palestine. But it is a great mistake to suppose that such houses stand high in chivalric tradition. Few except the poor preserve traditions. Aristocrats live not in traditions but in fashions. The Bohuns had been Mohocks under Queen Anne and Mashers under Queen Victoria. But like more than one of the really ancient houses, they had rotted in the last two centuries into mere drunkards and dandy degenerates, till there had even come a whisper of insanity. Certainly there was something hardly human about the colonel's wolfish pursuit of pleasure, and his chronic resolution not to go home till morning had a touch of the hideous clarity of insomnia. He was a tall, fine animal, elderly, but with hair still startlingly yellow. He would have looked merely blond and leonine, but his blue eyes were sunk so deep in his face that they looked black. They were a little too close together. He had very long yellow moustaches; on each side of them a fold or furrow from nostril to jaw, so that a sneer seemed cut into his face. Over his evening clothes he wore a curious pale yellow coat that looked more like a very light dressing-gown than an overcoat, and on the back of his head was stuck an extraordinary broad-brimmed hat of a bright green colour, evidently some oriental curiosity caught up at random. He was proud of appearing in such incongruous attires—proud of the fact that he always made them look congruous.

His brother the curate had also the yellow hair and the elegance, but he was buttoned up to the chin in black, and his face was clean-shaven, cultivated, and a little nervous. He seemed to live for nothing but his religion; but there were some who said (notably the blacksmith, who was a Presbyterian) that it was a love of Gothic architecture rather than of God, and that his haunting of the church like a ghost was only another and purer turn of the almost morbid thirst for beauty which sent his brother raging after women and wine. This charge was doubtful, while the man's practical piety was indubitable. Indeed, the charge was mostly an ignorant misunderstanding of the love of solitude and secret prayer, and was founded on his being often found kneeling, not before the altar, but in peculiar places, in the crypts or gallery, or even in the belfry. He was at the moment about to enter the church through the yard of the smithy, but stopped and frowned a little as he saw his brother's cavernous eyes staring in the same direction. On the hypothesis that the colonel was interested in the church he did not waste any speculations. There only remained the blacksmith's shop, and though the blacksmith was a Puritan and none of his people, Wilfred Bohun had heard some scandals about a beautiful and rather celebrated wife. He flung a suspicious look across the shed, and the colonel stood up laughing to speak to him.

"Good morning, Wilfred," he said. "Like a good landlord I am watching sleeplessly over my people. I am going to call on the blacksmith."

Wilfred looked at the ground, and said: "The blacksmith is out. He is over at Greenford."

"I know," answered the other with silent laughter; "that is why I am calling on him."

"Norman," said the cleric, with his eye on a pebble in the road, "are you ever afraid of thunderbolts?"

"What do you mean?" asked the colonel. "Is your hobby meteorology?"

"I mean," said Wilfred, without looking up, "do you ever think that God might strike you in the street?"

"I beg your pardon," said the colonel; "I see your hobby is folk-lore."

"I know your hobby is blasphemy," retorted the religious man, stung in the one live place of his nature. "But if you do not fear God, you have good reason to fear man."

The elder raised his eyebrows politely. "Fear man?" he said.

"Barnes the blacksmith is the biggest and strongest man for forty miles round," said the clergyman sternly. "I know you are no coward or weakling, but he could throw you over the wall."

This struck home, being true, and the lowering line by mouth and nostril darkened and deepened. For a moment he stood with the heavy sneer on his face. But in an instant Colonel Bohun had recovered his own cruel good humour and laughed, showing two dog-like front teeth under his yellow moustache. "In that case, my dear Wilfred," he said quite carelessly, "it was wise for the last of the Bohuns to come out partially in armour."

And he took off the queer round hat covered with green, showing that it was lined within with steel. Wilfred recognised it indeed as a light Japanese or Chinese helmet torn down from a trophy that hung in the old family hall.

"It was the first hat to hand," explained his brother airily; "always the nearest hat—and the nearest woman."

"The blacksmith is away at Greenford," said Wilfred quietly; "the time of his return is unsettled."

And with that he turned and went into the church with bowed head, crossing himself like one who wishes to be quit of an unclean spirit. He was anxious to forget such grossness in the cool twilight of his tall Gothic cloisters; but on that morning it was fated that his still round of religious exercises should be everywhere arrested by small shocks. As he entered the church, hitherto always empty at that hour, a kneeling figure rose hastily to its feet and came towards the full daylight of the doorway. When the curate saw it he stood still with surprise. For the early worshipper was none other than the village idiot, a nephew of the blacksmith, one who neither would nor could care for the church or for anything else. He was always called "Mad Joe," and seemed to have no other name; he was a dark, strong, slouching lad, with a heavy white face, dark straight hair, and a mouth always open. As he passed the priest, his moon-calf countenance gave no hint of what he had been doing or thinking of. He had never been known to pray before. What sort of prayers was he saying now? Extraordinary prayers surely.

Wilfred Bohun stood rooted to the spot long enough to see the idiot go out into the sunshine, and even to see his dissolute brother hail him with a sort of

avuncular jocularity. The last thing he saw was the colonel throwing pennies at the open mouth of Joe, with the serious appearance of trying to hit it.

This ugly sunlight picture of the stupidity and cruelty of the earth sent the ascetic finally to his prayers for purification and new thoughts. He went up to a pew in the gallery, which brought him under a coloured window which he loved and always quieted his spirit; a blue window with an angel carrying lilies. There he began to think less about the half-wit, with his livid face and mouth like a fish. He began to think less of his evil brother, pacing like a lean lion in his horrible hunger. He sank deeper and deeper into those cold and sweet colours of silver blossoms and sapphire sky.

In this place half an hour afterwards he was found by Gibbs, the village cobbler, who had been sent for him in some haste. He got to his feet with promptitude, for he knew that no small matter would have brought Gibbs into such a place at all. The cobbler was, as in many villages, an atheist, and his appearance in church was a shade more extraordinary than Mad Joe's. It was a morning of theological enigmas.

"What is it?" asked Wilfred Bohun rather stiffly, but putting out a trembling hand for his hat.

The atheist spoke in a tone that, coming from him, was quite startlingly respectful, and even, as it were, huskily sympathetic.

"You must excuse me, sir," he said in a hoarse whisper, "but we didn't think it right not to let you know at once. I'm afraid a rather dreadful thing has happened, sir. I'm afraid your brother——"

Wilfred clenched his frail hands. "What devilry has he done now?" he cried in involuntary passion.

"Why, sir," said the cobbler, coughing, "I'm afraid he's done nothing, and won't do anything. I'm afraid he's done for. You had really better come down, sir."

The curate followed the cobbler down a short winding stair, which brought them out at an entrance rather higher than the street. Bohun saw the tragedy in one glance, flat underneath him like a plan. In the yard of the smithy were standing five or six men mostly in black, one in an inspector's uniform. They included the doctor, the Presbyterian minister, and the priest from the Roman Catholic chapel, to which the blacksmith's wife belonged. The latter was speaking to her, indeed, very rapidly, in an undertone, as she, a magnificent woman with red-gold hair, was sobbing blindly on a bench. Between these two groups, and just clear of the main heap of hammers, lay a man in evening dress, spread-eagled and flat on his face. From the height above Wilfred could have sworn to every item of his costume and appearance, down to the Bohun rings upon his fingers; but the skull was only a hideous splash, like a star of blackness and blood.

Wilfred Bohun gave but one glance, and ran down the steps into the yard. The doctor, who was the family physician, saluted him, but he scarcely took any notice. He could only stammer out: "My brother is dead. What does it mean? What is this horrible mystery?" There was an unhappy silence; and then the cob-

bler, the most outspoken man present, answered: "Plenty of horror, sir," he said, "but not much mystery."

"What do you mean?" asked Wilfred, with a white face.

"It's plain enough," answered Gibbs. "There is only one man for forty miles round that could have struck such a blow as that, and he's the man that had most reason to."

"We must not prejudge anything," put in the doctor, a tall, black-bearded man, rather nervously; "but it is competent for me to corroborate what Mr. Gibbs says about the nature of the blow, sir; it is an incredible blow. Mr. Gibbs says that only one man in this district could have done it. I should have said myself that nobody could have done it."

A shudder of superstition went through the slight figure of the curate. "I can hardly understand," he said.

"Mr. Bohun," said the doctor in a low voice, "metaphors literally fail me. It is inadequate to say that the skull was smashed to bits like an egg-shell. Fragments of bone were driven into the body and the ground like bullets into a mud wall. It was the hand of a giant."

He was silent a moment, looking grimly through his glasses; then he added: "The thing has one advantage—that it clears most people of suspicion at one stroke. If you or I or any normally made man in the country were accused of this crime, we should be acquitted as an infant would be acquitted of stealing the Nelson Column."

"That's what I say," repeated the cobbler obstinately; "there's only one man that could have done it, and he's the man that would have done it. Where's Simeon Barnes, the blacksmith?"

"He's over at Greenford," faltered the curate.

"More likely over in France," muttered the cobbler.

"No; he is in neither of those places," said a small and colourless voice, which came from the little Roman priest who had joined the group. "As a matter of fact, he is coming up the road at this moment."

The little priest was not an interesting man to look at, having stubbly brown hair and a round and stolid face. But if he had been as splendid as Apollo no one would have looked at him at that moment. Everyone turned round and peered at the pathway which wound across the plain below, along which was indeed walking, at his own huge stride and with a hammer on his shoulder, Simeon the smith. He was a bony and gigantic man, with deep, dark, sinister eyes and a dark chin beard. He was walking and talking quietly with two other men; and though he was never specially cheerful, he seemed quite at his ease.

"My God!" cried the atheistic cobbler, "and there's the hammer he did it with."

"No," said the inspector, a sensible-looking man with a sandy moustache, speaking for the first time. "There's the hammer he did it with over there by the church wall. We have left it and the body exactly as they are."

All glanced round, and the short priest went across and looked down in silence at the tool where it lay. It was one of the smallest and the lightest of the ham-

mers, and would not have caught the eye among the rest; but on the iron edge of it were blood and yellow hair.

After a silence the short priest spoke without looking up, and there was a new note in his dull voice. "Mr. Gibbs was hardly right," he said, "in saying that there is no mystery. There is at least the mystery of why so big a man should attempt so big a blow with so little a hammer."

"Oh, never mind that," cried Gibbs, in a fever. "What are we to do with Simeon Barnes?"

"Leave him alone," said the priest quietly. "He is coming here of himself. I know those two men with him. They are very good fellows from Greenford, and they have come over about the Presbyterian chapel."

Even as he spoke the tall smith swung round the corner of the church, and strode into his own yard. Then he stood there quite still, and the hammer fell from his hand. The inspector, who had preserved impenetrable propriety, immediately went up to him.

"I won't ask you, Mr. Barnes," he said, "whether you know anything about what has happened here. You are not bound to say. I hope you don't know, and that you will be able to prove it. But I must go through the form of arresting you in the King's name for the murder of Colonel Norman Bohun."

"You are not bound to say anything," said the cobbler in officious excitement. "They've got to prove everything. They haven't proved yet that it is Colonel Bohun, with the head all smashed up like that."

"That won't wash," said the doctor aside to the priest. "That's out of the detective stories. I was the colonel's medical man, and I knew his body better than he did. He had very fine hands, but quite peculiar ones. The second and third fingers were the same in length. Oh, that's the colonel right enough."

As he glanced at the brained corpse upon the ground the iron eyes of the motionless blacksmith followed them and rested there also.

"Is Colonel Bohun dead?" said the smith quite calmly. "Then he's damned."

"Don't say anything! Oh, don't say anything," cried the atheist cobbler, dancing about in an ecstasy of admiration of the English legal system. For no man is such a legalist as the good Secularist.

The blacksmith turned on him over his shoulder the august face of a fanatic.

"It's well for you infidels to dodge like foxes because the world's law favours you," he said; "but God guards His own in His pocket, as you shall see this day."

Then he pointed to the colonel and said: "When did this dog die in his sins?"

"Moderate your language," said the doctor.

"Moderate the Bible's language, and I'll moderate mine. When did he die?"

"I saw him alive at six o'clock this morning," stammered Wilfred Bohun.

"God is good," said the smith. "Mr. Inspector, I have not the slightest objection to being arrested. It is you who may object to arresting me. I don't mind leaving the court without a stain on my character. You do mind, perhaps, leaving the court with a bad set-back in your career."

The solid inspector for the first time looked at the blacksmith with a lively

eye; as did everybody else, except the short, strange priest, who was still looking down at the little hammer that had dealt the dreadful blow.

"There are two men standing outside this shop," went on the blacksmith with ponderous lucidity, "good tradesmen in Greenford whom you all know, who will swear that they saw me from before midnight till daybreak and long after in the committee-room of our Revival Mission, which sits all night, we save souls so fast. In Greenford itself twenty people could swear to me for all that time. If I were a heathen, Mr. Inspector, I would let you walk on to your downfall. But as a Christian man I feel bound to give you your chance, and ask you whether you will hear my alibi now or in court."

The inspector seemed for the first time disturbed, and said, "Of course I should be glad to clear you altogether now."

The smith walked out of his yard with the same long and easy stride, and returned to his two friends from Greenford, who were indeed friends of nearly everyone present. Each of them said a few words which no one ever thought of disbelieving. When they had spoken, the innocence of Simeon stood up as solid as the great church above them.

One of those silences struck the group which are more strange and insufferable than any speech. Madly, in order to make conversation, the curate said to the Catholic priest:

"You seem very much interested in that hammer, Father Brown."

"Yes, I am," said Father Brown; "why is it such a small hammer?"

The doctor swung round on him.

"By George, that's true," he cried; "who would use a little hammer with ten larger hammers lying about?"

Then he lowered his voice in the curate's ear and said: "Only the kind of person that can't lift a large hammer. It is not a question of force or courage between the sexes. It's a question of lifting power in the shoulders. A bold woman could commit ten murders with a light hammer and never turn a hair. She could not kill a beetle with a heavy one."

Wilfred Bohun was staring at him with a sort of hypnotised horror, while Father Brown listened with his head a little on one side, really interested and attentive. The doctor went on with more hissing emphasis:

"Why do these idiots always assume that the only person who hates the wife's lover is the wife's husband? Nine times out of ten the person who most hates the wife's lover is the wife. Who knows what insolence or treachery he had shown her—look there?"

He made a momentary gesture towards the red-haired woman on the bench. She had lifted her head at last and the tears were drying on her splendid face. But the eyes were fixed on the corpse with an electric glare that had in it something of idiocy.

The Rev. Wilfred Bohun made a limp gesture as if waving away all desire to know; but Father Brown, dusting off his sleeve some ashes blown from the furnace, spoke in his indifferent way.

"You are like so many doctors," he said; "your mental science is really sugges-

tive. It is your physical science that is utterly impossible. I agree that the woman wants to kill the co-respondent much more than the petitioner does. And I agree that a woman will always pick up a small hammer instead of a big one. But the difficulty is one of physical impossibility. No woman ever born could have smashed a man's skull out flat like that." Then he added reflectively, after a pause: "These people haven't grasped the whole of it. The man was actually wearing an iron helmet, and the blow scattered it like broken glass. Look at that woman. Look at her arms."

Silence held them all up again, and then the doctor said rather sulkily: "Well, I may be wrong; there are objections to everything. But I stick to the main point. No man but an idiot would pick up that little hammer if he could use a big hammer."

With that the lean and quivering hands of Wilfred Bohun went up to his head and seemed to clutch his scanty yellow hair. After an instant they dropped, and he cried: "That was the word I wanted; you have said the word."

Then he continued, mastering his discomposure: "The words you said were, 'No man but an idiot would pick up the small hammer.' "

"Yes," said the doctor. "Well?"

"Well," said the curate, "no man but an idiot did." The rest stared at him with eyes arrested and riveted, and he went on in a febrile and feminine agitation.

"I am a priest," he cried unsteadily, "and a priest should be no shedder of blood. I—I mean that he should bring no one to the gallows. And I thank God that I see the criminal clearly now—because he is a criminal who cannot be brought to the gallows."

"You will not denounce him?" enquired the doctor.

"He would not be hanged if I did denounce him," answered Wilfred with a wild but curiously happy smile. "When I went into the church this morning I found a madman praying there—that poor Joe, who has been wrong all his life. God knows what he prayed; but with such strange folk it is not incredible to suppose that their prayers are all upside down. Very likely a lunatic would pray before killing a man. When I last saw poor Joe he was with my brother. My brother was mocking him."

"By Jove!" cried the doctor, "this is talking at last. But how do you explain——"

The Rev. Wilfred was almost trembling with the excitement of his own glimpse of the truth. "Don't you see; don't you see," he cried feverishly; "that is the only theory that covers both the queer things, that answers both the riddles. The two riddles are the little hammer and the big blow. The smith might have struck the big blow, but would not have chosen the little hammer. His wife would have chosen the little hammer, but she could not have struck the big blow. But the madman might have done both. As for the little hammer—why, he was mad and might have picked up anything. And for the big blow, have you never heard, doctor, that a maniac in his paroxysm may have the strength of ten men?"

The doctor drew a deep breath and then said, "By golly, I believe you've got it."

Father Brown had fixed his eyes on the speaker so long and steadily as to prove that his large grey, ox-like eyes were not quite so insignificant as the rest of his face. When silence had fallen he said with marked respect: "Mr. Bohun, yours is the only theory yet propounded which holds water every way and is essentially unassailable. I think, therefore, that you deserve to be told, on my positive knowledge, that it is not the true one." And with that the old little man walked away and stared again at the hammer.

"That fellow seems to know more than he ought to," whispered the doctor peevishly to Wilfred. "Those popish priests are deucedly sly."

"No, no," said Bohun, with a sort of wild fatigue. "It was the lunatic. It was the lunatic."

The group of the two clerics and the doctor had fallen away from the more official group containing the inspector and the man he had arrested. Now, however, that their own party had broken up, they heard voices from the others. The priest looked up quietly and then looked down again as he heard the blacksmith say in a loud voice:

"I hope I've convinced you, Mr. Inspector. I'm a strong man, as you say, but I couldn't have flung my hammer bang here from Greenford. My hammer hasn't any wings that it should come flying half a mile over hedges and fields."

The inspector laughed amicably and said: "No, I think you can be considered out of it, though it's one of the rummiest coincidences I ever saw. I can only ask you to give us all the assistance you can in finding a man as big and strong as yourself. By George! you might be useful, if only to hold him! I suppose you yourself have no guess at the man?"

"I may have a guess," said the pale smith, "but it is not at a man." Then, seeing the scared eyes turn towards his wife on the bench, he put his huge hand on her shoulder and said: "Nor a woman either."

"What do you mean?" asked the inspector jocularly. "You don't think cows use hammers, do you?"

"I think no thing of flesh held that hammer," said the blacksmith in a stifled voice; "mortally speaking, I think the man died alone."

Wilfred made a sudden forward movement and peered at him with burning eyes.

"Do you mean to say, Barnes," came the sharp voice of the cobbler, "that the hammer jumped up of itself and knocked the man down?"

"Oh, you gentlemen may stare and snigger," cried Simeon; "you clergymen who tell us on Sunday in what a stillness the Lord smote Sennacherib. I believe that One who walks invisible in every house defended the honour of mine, and laid the defiler dead before the door of it. I believe the force in that blow was just the force there is in earthquakes, and no force less."

Wilfred said, with a voice utterly undescribable: "I told Norman myself to beware of the thunderbolt."

"That agent is outside my jurisdiction," said the inspector with a slight smile.

"You are not outside His," answered the smith; "see you to it," and, turning his broad back, he went into the house.

The shaken Wilfred was led away by Father Brown, who had an easy and friendly way with him. "Let us get out of this horrid place, Mr. Bohun," he said. "May I look inside your church? I hear it's one of the oldest in England. We take some interest, you know," he added with a comical grimace, "in old English churches."

Wilfred Bohun did not smile, for humour was never his strong point. But he nodded rather eagerly, being only too ready to explain the Gothic splendours to someone more likely to be sympathetic than the Presbyterian blacksmith or the atheist cobbler.

"By all means," he said; "let us go in at this side." And he led the way into the high side entrance at the top of the flight of steps. Father Brown was mounting the first step to follow him when he felt a hand on his shoulder, and turned to behold the dark, thin figure of the doctor, his face darker yet with suspicion.

"Sir," said the physician harshly, "you appear to know some secrets in this black business. May I ask if you are going to keep them to yourself?"

"Why, doctor," answered the priest, smiling quite pleasantly, "there is one very good reason why a man of my trade should keep things to himself when he is not sure of them, and that is that it is so constantly his duty to keep them to himself when he is sure of them. But if you think I have been discourteously reticent with you or anyone, I will go to the extreme limit of my custom. I will give you two very large hints."

"Well, sir?" said the doctor gloomily.

"First," said Father Brown quietly, "the thing is quite in your own province. It is a matter of physical science. The blacksmith is mistaken, not perhaps in saying that the blow was divine, but certainly in saying that it came by a miracle. It was no miracle, doctor, except in so far as a man is himself a miracle, with his strange and wicked and yet half-heroic heart. The force that smashed that skull was a force well known to scientists—one of the most frequently debated of the laws of nature."

The doctor, who was looking at him with frowning intentness, only said: "And the other hint!"

"The other hint is this," said the priest. "Do you remember the blacksmith, though he believes in miracles, talking scornfully of the impossible fairy tale that his hammer had wings and flew half a mile across country?"

"Yes," said the doctor, "I remember that."

"Well," added Father Brown, with a broad smile, "that fairy tale was the nearest thing to the real truth that has been said to-day." And with that he turned his back and stumped up the steps after the curate.

The Reverend Wilfred, who had been waiting for him, pale and impatient, as if this little delay were the last straw for his nerves, led him immediately to his favourite corner of the church, that part of the gallery closest to the carved roof and lit by the wonderful window with the angel. The little Latin priest explored and admired everything exhaustively, talking cheerfully but in a low

voice all the time. When in the course of his investigation he found the side exit and the winding stair down which Wilfred had rushed to find his brother dead, Father Brown ran not down but up, with the agility of a monkey, and his clear voice came from an outer platform above.

"Come up here, Mr. Bohun," he called. "The air will do you good."

Bohun followed him, and came out on a kind of stone gallery or balcony outside the building, from which one could see the illimitable plain in which their small hill stood, wooded away to the purple horizon and dotted with villages and farms. Clear and square, but quite small beneath them, was the blacksmith's yard, where the inspector still stood taking notes and the corpse still lay like a smashed fly.

"Might be the map of the world, mightn't it?" said Father Brown.

"Yes," said Bohun very gravely, and nodded his head.

Immediately beneath and about them the lines of the Gothic building plunged outwards into the void with a sickening swiftness akin to suicide. There is that element of Titan energy in the architecture of the Middle Ages that, from whatever aspect it be seen, it always seems to be rushing away, like the strong back of some maddened horse. This church was hewn out of ancient and silent stone, bearded with old fungoids and stained with the nests of birds. And yet, when they saw it from below, it sprang like a fountain at the stars; and when they saw it, as now, from above, it poured like a cataract into a voiceless pit. For these two men on the tower were left alone with the most terrible aspect of the Gothic; the monstrous foreshortening and disproportion, the dizzy perspectives, the glimpses of great things small and small things great; a topsy-turvydom of stone in the mid-air. Details of stone, enormous by their proximity, were relieved against a pattern of fields and farms, pygmy in their distance. A carved bird or beast at a corner seemed like some vast walking or flying dragon wasting the pastures and villages below. The whole atmosphere was dizzy and dangerous, as if men were upheld in air amid the gyrating wings of colossal genii; and the whole of that old church, as tall and rich as a cathedral, seemed to sit upon the sunlit country like a cloud-burst.

"I think there is something rather dangerous about standing on these high places even to pray," said Father Brown. "Heights were made to be looked at, not to be looked from."

"Do you mean that one may fall over?" asked Wilfred.

"I mean that one's soul may fall if one's body doesn't," said the other priest.

"I scarcely understand you," remarked Bohun indistinctly.

"Look at that blacksmith, for instance," went on Father Brown calmly; "a good man, but not a Christian—hard, imperious, unforgiving. Well, his Scotch religion was made up by men who prayed on hills and high crags, and learnt to look down on the world more than to look up at heaven. Humility is the mother of giants. One sees great things from the valley; only small things from the peak."

"But he—he didn't do it," said Bohun tremulously.

"No," said the other in an odd voice; "we know he didn't do it."

After a moment he resumed, looking tranquilly out over the plain with his

pale grey eyes. "I knew a man," he said, "who began by worshipping with others before the altar, but who grew fond of high and lonely places to pray from, corners or niches in the belfry or the spire. And once in one of those dizzy places, where the whole world seemed to turn under him like a wheel, his brain turned also, and he fancied he was God. So that though he was a good man, he committed a great crime."

Wilfred's face was turned away, but his bony hands turned blue and white as they tightened on the parapet of stone.

"He thought it was given to *him* to judge the world and strike down the sinner. He would never have had such a thought if he had been kneeling with other men upon a floor. But he saw all men walking about like insects. He saw one especially strutting just below him, insolent and evident by the bright green hat—a poisonous insect."

Rooks cawed round the corners of the belfry; but there was no other sound till Father Brown went on.

"This also tempted him, that he had in his hand one of the most awful engines of nature; I mean gravitation, that mad and quickening rush by which all earth's creatures fly back to her heart when released. See, the inspector is strutting just below us in the smithy. If I were to toss a pebble over this parapet it would be something like a bullet by the time it struck him. If I were to drop a hammer —even a small hammer—"

Wilfred Bohun threw one leg over the parapet, and Father Brown had him in a minute by the collar.

"Not by that door," he said quite gently; "that door leads to hell."

Bohun staggered back against the wall, and stared at him with frightful eyes.

"How do you know all this?" he cried. "Are you a devil?"

"I am a man," answered Father Brown gravely; "and therefore have all devils in my heart. Listen to me," he said after a short pause. "I know what you did—at least, I can guess the great part of it. When you left your brother you were racked with no unrighteous rage to the extent even that you snatched up a small hammer, half inclined to kill him with his foulness on his mouth. Recoiling, you thrust it under your buttoned coat instead, and rushed into the church. You pray wildly in many places, under the angel window, upon the platform above, and on a higher platform still, from which you could see the colonel's Eastern hat like the back of a green beetle crawling about. Then something snapped in your soul, and you let God's thunderbolt fall."

Wilfred put a weak hand to his head, and asked in a low voice: "How did you know that his hat looked like a green beetle?"

"Oh, that," said the other with the shadow of a smile, "that was common sense. But hear me further. I say I know all this; but no one else shall know it. The next step is for you; I shall take no more steps; I will seal this with the seal of confession. If you ask me why, there are many reasons, and only one that concerns you. I leave things to you because you have not yet gone very far wrong, as assassins go. You did not help to fix the crime on the smith when it was easy; or on his wife, when that was easy. You tried to fix it on the imbecile because

you knew that he could not suffer. That was one of the gleams that it is my business to find in assassins. And now come down into the village, and go your own way as free as the wind; for I have said my last word."

They went down the winding stairs in utter silence, and came out into the sunlight by the smithy. Wilfred Bohun carefully unlatched the wooden gate of the yard, and going up to the inspector, said: "I wish to give myself up; I have killed my brother."

H. C. Bailey

THE LONG BARROW

from Mr. Fortune's Trials

E. P. Dutton & Co.

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Mr. Fortune came back from the Zoo pensive. He had been called to the inquest on Zuleika the lemur—a strange, sad case.

He rang for tea, and was given a lady's card. Miss Isabel Woodall, who had no address, wished to consult Mr. Fortune: she had been waiting half an hour. Mr. Fortune sighed and went into the ante-room.

Miss Isabel Woodall stood up, a woman who had been younger, still demurely handsome. She was large and fair, but so plainly and darkly dressed that she made little of herself. "Mr. Fortune?" she said with a pleasant shy smile.

"Yes. I'm afraid you didn't know that I'm not in practice now."

"But I didn't come to see you—er—medically. I'm not a patient, Mr. Fortune. I'm not ill. At least I don't think so. I wanted to consult you about a mystery."

"Oh! I never go into a mystery except with the police, Miss Woodall."

"The police won't do anything. They laugh at us." She twisted her handkerchief in her hands. "I'm frightfully worried, Mr. Fortune. And I don't know what to do." She looked at him with large, anxious eyes. "Do you mind hearing about it?"

Reggie Fortune decided that he did not mind. She was good to look at. He opened the door of his consulting-room.

"I'm Mr. Larkin's secretary," she explained. "Mr. Joseph Larkin: do you know him?"

"The antiquary?" Reggie Fortune murmured.

"Archæologist." Miss Woodall corrected him sharply. "He's the greatest authority on the Stone Age in England, Mr. Fortune. He has a house down in Dorsetshire, just on the border of the New Forest country, Restharrow, Stoke

Abbas." As she seemed to expect it, Reggie made a note. "I've been working with him down there. But lately it's been horrible, Mr. Fortune." Her voice went up. "As if somebody wanted to drive me away."

"Yes. Now suppose we begin at the beginning. How long have you been Mr. Larkin's secretary?"

"Oh, more than six months now."

"And nobody was ever horrible to you before?"

She stared at him. "Of course not. Nothing ever happened to me before. What do you mean, Mr. Fortune? You don't think it's Mr. Larkin, do you?"

"I haven't begun to think," said Reggie. "Well, you lived a peaceful life till you became Mr. Larkin's secretary. And then?"

"Oh, yes, and long after that. It was all quite peaceful while we were in London. But in the spring Mr. Larkin took this house at Stoke Abbas. It's a very lovely place, where the moors meet the downs. Mr. Larkin wanted to study the prehistoric remains about there. There's lots of them, ancient earthworks and burial places."

"Yes. Several long barrows on the hills."

She leaned forward clasping her hands. "That's it, Mr. Fortune," she said in a low, eager voice. "Mr. Larkin has been making plans to excavate the long barrow above Stoke Abbas. Did you know about it?"

Reggie smiled. "No. No. I'm afraid Mr. Larkin hadn't attracted my attention."

She flung herself back in her chair. She gave a little cry of irritation. "Do please be serious! That's just like the stupid police down there. They only make fun of it all as if I was a nervous fool. But it's horrible, Mr. Fortune."

"Why not tell me what it is?" Reggie suggested.

"That is what is so difficult." She looked down at herself, arranged the blouse at her bosom. "You see, there isn't anything definite. It's as if some one was working against me; as if some one wanted to hurt me. I'm being followed, Mr. Fortune. Whenever I go out alone, I'm followed."

Reggie sighed. Many people have made that complaint to patient doctors, and incredulous policemen. "Who follows you?" he said wearily.

"But I don't know! Only I'm sure there is somebody. I'm being watched."

"Why should anybody watch you, Miss Woodall?"

"That's what I want to know," she cried. "But somebody does, Mr. Fortune. I've heard him. I've seen his shadow."

"Oh, you are sure it's a man," Reggie smiled.

"You don't believe me, do you?" Miss Woodall was growing angry with him. "That isn't all. When I go out alone I find dead animals."

Reggie sat up. "Do you though?"

She thought he was still satirical. "Yes, I do, Mr. Fortune. Real ones. I've found two crows and another bird—a jay, I think it was—and a weasel. Horrible." She shuddered.

"Extraordinary mortality among the animals of Stoke Abbas," Reggie murmured. "How did they die, Miss Woodall?"

"Good gracious, I don't know. They were very dead. Just on the path where I was walking."

"Yes, that's very interesting," said Reggie.

"It frightens me, Mr. Fortune. What does it mean?"

"I should rather like to know," Reggie admitted. "Yes, I'll look into it, Miss Woodall."

"You yourself? Oh, thank you so much. If you would! I do so want it cleared up." She was effusively grateful. She fumbled in her bag. "I really don't know what your fee is, Mr. Fortune."

"There isn't one, Miss Woodall." He got rid of her. He consulted a book of references upon Mr. Joseph Larkin. "I wonder," he said, and rang again for tea.

On the next day, he sat down to lunch in that one of his clubs where they understand the virtues of the herring. The chief of the Criminal Investigation Department saw him, and tripped across to his table. Both men love the simple life. They engaged upon a profound discussion whether the herring when pickled is the better for cloves. "In the delights of your conversation, Reginald," the Hon. Sidney Lomas protested at last, "I'm forgetting that I wanted to speak to you. A quaint old bird came to me this morning, one Joseph Larkin, an archæologist. He said—"

"He said," Reggie interrupted, "that he wanted to excavate a long barrow at Stoke Abbas and somebody was interferin' with the progress of science and nobody loved him, and what are the police for, anyway? Is that right, sir?"

"How do you do it, Reginald? Messages from the spirit-world, or just thought-reading?"

Reggie smiled. "Satan's Invisible World Displayed: by R. Fortune. No, Lomas, old thing. No magic. The fair Isabel told me her sorrow."

"That's Miss Woodall, the secretary? She came to you, did she? The old boy didn't tell me that."

"Well, the fair Isabel didn't tell me Joseph was going to you."

The two men looked at each other. "Curious lack of confidence about them," said Lomas.

"Yes. Several curious points. Well, what's Joseph's story? Is he followed when he goes out alone? Find dead animals in the path?"

"No carcasses for him. They're kept for Miss Woodall. He's followed. He hears strange noises at night. They come from outside the house. He's quite clear about that."

"Isabel didn't mention noises," Reggie murmured.

"No. The old boy said she hadn't heard them, and he didn't want to worry her, she was worried quite enough. That's his chief trouble. He seems rather gone on his fair secretary. What did you make of her, Reginald?"

"She's got the wind up all right. And she wasn't born yesterday. Queer case."

"Simple enough," Lomas shrugged. "The old boy goes down to this lonely place and wants to dig up an old grave, and the country people don't like it, and put up practical jokes to scare him off. That's what the local police think. I've been talking to them on the 'phone this morning."

"And the local police don't want to have a fuss with the local people over a couple of strangers."

"I sympathise," Lomas smiled. "Anyway, there's nothing for us."

"I wonder?" Reggie said. "Why did one come to me and the other to you?"

"Oh, my dear fellow! They're both scared, and each of them wants to hide it from the other. Each of 'em thinks something horrid may happen to the other, and wants protection without making the other more scared."

"Yes. All very natural. Do you know anything about 'em?"

"Joseph is a man of means. Isabel came to him six months ago. Very highly qualified, he says. Classical scholar. Woman in a thousand for his job."

Reggie smiled. "His job! My dear fellow, he hasn't got a job. He's only a crank. He's always fussing round here, there, and everywhere. Why is he so mighty keen on this particular long barrow? Why is Isabel so mighty nervous about being followed? She's no chicken and no fool."

"I don't know what you're getting to, Reginald," Lomas frowned.

"Nor do I. That's what worries me. I want to go and look at Stoke Abbas. Let me have Underwood."

"But what are you thinking of?" Lomas objected.

"I think it isn't as natural as it looks," said Mr. Fortune.

In the morning his car picked up Sergeant Underwood and bore that officer away on the Southampton road. Sergeant Underwood, who looks like a nice, innocent undergraduate, lay back luxuriously enjoying the big car's purring speed. Reggie was studying an ordnance map of large scale. They were rushing the hill to Bagshot before he put it away and smiled at Underwood. "Well, my child, do you think you'll like it?"

"I like working under you, Mr. Fortune. But I don't know what I have to do."

"You have to catch butterflies. You're a promisin' young entomologist lookin' for rare species round the New Forest." He proceeded to give a lecture on English butterflies and moths. "Entomology in one lesson: by R. Fortune. Got that?"

Sergeant Underwood gasped a little. The labours of his intellect were betrayed on his comely face. "Yes, sir. Some of it. But Mr. Lomas said something about a long barrow. I don't rightly know what a long barrow is. But how does that come into butterflies?"

"It doesn't. A long barrow is the mound over an old grave. Thousands of years old." He opened the ordnance map. "This is our long barrow. Mr. Larkin and Miss Woodall—who live in that house—want to dig it up. And funny things have been happening. You're going to find a room in a nice pub somewhere near, but not too near, and watch the barrow and watch them and watch everybody—while catching butterflies."

In Southampton he bought Sergeant Underwood the complete equipment of a butterfly hunter, and put him on the train to find his own way to Stoke Abbas. The car bore Mr. Fortune on through the green glades of the New Forest to the bare heath country.

It was a day of cloud, and the very air over the moors was grey, and the long waves of heather were dark as the black earth, the distant woodland had

no colour, the form of the chalk hills to northward was vague and dim. Mr. Fortune stopped the car and looked about him. Some grey smoke hung in a hollow from unseen houses. As far as he could see there was no man nor any of the works of man. The moor carried no cattle. There was no sign of life but the hum of bees, and the chirp of grasshoppers, and the flies and butterflies in the heavy air.

"Empty, isn't it, Sam?" said Mr. Fortune, and got out of the car.

"Brighter London!" said Sam the chauffeur.

Mr. Fortune took a track across the heather. It was heavy going, rather like a ditch than a path, an old track long disused and overgrown, but its depth showed that many feet must have passed that way once. It passed by a grey hovel lurking in a dip of the moor where a shaggy donkey was tethered, and some fowls of the old game-cock breed scratched in the sand. The thatch of heather was ragged, the mud walls crumbling here and there showed the wattle framework, the little windows were uncurtained.

The track led on to a bluff hill. Mr. Fortune groaned (he does not love walking) and set himself to climb. The hill-side was seared by a long scar. When he came to it he found the double ditch and bank of an old fort. He scrambled in and out and reached the flat hill-top. There rose the mound of the long barrow of Stoke Abbas.

Mr. Joseph Larkin had done no digging yet. Nor anyone else. The mound was clothed in heather and old gnarled gorse. The black sods beneath had not been turned for many a year.

Reggie looked over miles of bare moor and saw no one between him and the horizon. But on one side the hill was scooped out like a bowl, and down in the depths a rabbit scuttered to its burrow. Mr. Fortune went down that way. A man was squatting in the heather, binding bunches of it into little brooms, far too busy to look at him. "Oh, good day," said Mr. Fortune, and stopped. "What's the name of that thing up there?"

The man lifted his bent shoulders and showed a dark, beardless face, wide across the cheekbones, a big head for his small size. He stared like a startled animal.

"Do you know the name of that thing up there?" Reggie said again.

"Dragon Hill, 'tis Dragon Hill," the man cried, gathered up brooms and slid away through the heather. His legs were short, he was broad in the beam, his speed was surprising.

Mr. Fortune trudged back to his car and was driven to the house of Mr. Joseph Larkin. It stood beyond the village in a shrubbery of rhododendrons, a plain red-brick box. Mr. Larkin was out. Miss Woodall was out too.

The conventional furniture of the drawing-room was dismal. It seemed to contain no book but *Paradise Lost*, illustrated by Gustave Doré. Mr. Fortune shuddered and wandered drearily to and fro till he found on the writing-table the catalogue of a second-hand bookseller.

Mr. Larkin seemed to have an odd taste in books. Those which he had chosen to mark were a mixed lot—somebody's sermons, a child's picture book, Mr.

Smiles on Thrift, a history of aviation, Izaak Walton. He marked them in a queer way. A line was drawn under one letter. Reggie Fortune pondered. The letters underlined were S K U T H A I: probably more farther on in the catalogue. But some one was talking outside. Reggie put the catalogue back.

A chubby old fellow came in smiling. "Mr. Reginald Fortune? I don't think I have the pleasure—"

"You called on Scotland Yard, Mr. Larkin."

"Oh, you've come from Mr. Lomas! That's very good of you, very good indeed." He smiled all over his rosy face. "Now let's just go into the study and I'll tell you all about it."

He did. He told at great length, but he did not say anything new, and in the midst of it Miss Woodall arrived in a hurry. "Mr. Fortune! You've come down yourself! But how very kind." While she took Reggie's hand she smiled on Joseph Larkin.

He needed it. He had been much disconcerted. "Oh, do you know Mr. Fortune, my dear?" he said, frowning.

"I didn't. But he is the great expert, you know. I went to him to ask his advice about this horrible business."

"But, my dear child, you didn't tell me."

"I couldn't bear you to be so worried, Mr. Larkin," she laid her hand on his arm.

"There, there. But you shouldn't, you know. You really shouldn't, my dear. Leave everything to me."

"You are kind," she murmured.

"I have arranged it all," Mr. Larkin chirped. "I went to the fountain head, Mr. Sidney Lomas. And here is our expert." He beamed on Reggie. "Now—now I think I've told you everything, Mr. Fortune."

"Well, not quite," Reggie murmured. "Why are you especially keen on this long barrow, Mr. Larkin?"

Mr. Larkin began to explain. It took a long time. It was something about Phœnicians. The Phœnicians, Reggie gathered, had been everywhere, and done everything before the dawn of time. Mr. Larkin had given his life to prove it. He had found evidence in many prehistoric remains in many countries. When he came down to Stoke Abbas to complete his great book on *The Origins of Our World* he found this fine barrow at his very door. Miss Woodall very properly suggested to him that—

"Oh, Mr. Larkin, I'm afraid it wasn't me." Miss Woodall smiled. "I'm not expert enough to advise."

"Well, well, my dear, you're a very capable assistant. We decided that when we'd finished the book we must excavate the barrow on Dragon Hill, Mr. Fortune."

"And that's how the trouble began," Reggie murmured. "Yes. Any particular reason why you came to Stoke Abbas?"

Mr. Larkin looked at Miss Woodall. "I—I really don't know. I think this house was the most suitable of any that you saw, my dear."

"Oh, much the most suitable. Mr. Larkin must have quiet, you see, Mr. Fortune."

"And this is charmingly quiet, my dear." They purred at each other, and Reggie felt embarrassed. "Charming—if only Mr. Fortune can stop this annoyance. I hope you'll stay with us, Mr. Fortune."

They went to bed early at Restharrow. About midnight Mr. Fortune, just dropping off to sleep, was roused by an odd whistling roaring noise, such a noise as a gale might make. But there was no gale. He went to the window and peered out. The moon was rising behind clouds, and he could see nothing but the dark mass of rhododendrons. There was a tap at the door and Mr. Larkin came in with a candle showing his pale face. "That's the noise, Mr. Fortune," he said. "What is it?"

"I wonder. Miss Woodall sleeps on the other side of the house?"

"Yes. I don't think she has ever heard it. It only comes and goes, you know. There! It's stopped. It'll come again. Off and on for half an hour or so. Most distressing. What can it be, Mr. Fortune?"

"I should rather like to know," Reggie murmured. They stood and listened and shivered, and when all was quiet at last he had some difficulty in getting Mr. Larkin to bed.

Reggie rose early. He saw the post come in, but Mr. Larkin and Miss Woodall were both down to take their letters. There was some mild fun about it. Mr. Larkin took the whole post by playful force, and sorted it with little jokes about "censoring your correspondence, my dear." It appeared to Reggie that the old gentleman was jealous in the matter of his fair secretary. But the only thing for her was a bookseller's catalogue.

After breakfast the two shut themselves into the study to work. Mr. Fortune went walking, and upon the moor found Sergeant Underwood in pursuit of a cabbage butterfly. His style with the net was truculent. "Game and set," Mr. Fortune smiled. "Fierce fellow. Don't be brutal, my child. No wanton shedding of blood."

Sergeant Underwood retrieved his net from a bramble. "I never hit the perishing things," he said, and mopped his brow.

"Never mind. You look zealous. Keep an eye on the hut over there in the hollow. I want to know who comes out and what he does."

After lunch Mr. Larkin and Miss Woodall rested from their labours. The old gentleman withdrew to his bedroom. The lady sat in the garden. Reggie went out. To the west of the grounds of Restharrow a clump of lime and elm rose to shelter the house from the wind. Reggie went up into one of the elms and climbed till he was hidden and high. He saw Miss Woodall leave the garden alone. She turned off the road by a footpath which led across the moor. Reggie took binoculars from his pocket. She went some way, looked about her and sat down in the heather. Her back was towards him, but he could see that she bent over a paper. Ahead of her a little dark shape moved in the heather, came near the path, and turned away and was lost in the folds of the moor. Miss Woodall rose and walked on. She stopped, she drew aside, looked all about her, and went

on more quickly. Reggie steadied his binoculars on the bough. She was going into the village, and among the houses he lost sight of her.

He slid to the ground and met her on her way back. "Alone, Miss Woodall? That's very brave."

"Isn't it?" She was flushed. "Do you know what I found on the path?"

"Yes. I've seen it. A dead stoat."

"Oh, horrible! What does it mean, Mr. Fortune?"

"I shouldn't worry about that," said Reggie. He went on. He saw a butterfly net waving.

"This is a rum business, sir," Sergeant Underwood protested. "A little fellow came out of that hut, kind of gipsy look, and he mooched about over the heath. Seemed to be looking at snares he had set. He found a beast over that way, and sat down there making brooms. Then a woman came down from the house, and he scuttled along and chucked the beast on to the path and cut off. Very rum game."

"Nothing in it," said Reggie sadly. "Well, we'd better deal with him. Go to your pub, my child, and have some food and a nap. I want you outside that hut after dark."

Soon after dinner that night, Mr. Fortune professed himself sleepy and went to his room. He smoked a cigar there, heard the household go to bed, changed into flannels and rubber shoes, and dropped unostentatiously out of the window. Among the rhododendrons he waited. It was a calm, grey night; he could see far, he could hear the faintest sound. Yet he had seen and heard nothing, when from behind the hedge which marked off the kitchen garden came that whistling, roaring noise. Mr. Fortune made for it, stealthily, as it seemed to him, silently. But he only caught sight of a little man whirling something at the end of a string when the noise ended in a whiz and the fellow ran off. Mr. Fortune followed, but running is not what he does best. The little man was leaving him from the start, and soon vanished into the moor. Mr. Fortune at a sober trot made for the hovel under the hill, and as he drew near whistled.

He arrived to find Sergeant Underwood sitting on a little man who wriggled. "I'm a police officer, that's what I am," Underwood was saying. "Now don't you be nasty, or I'll have to be harsh with you."

Reggie flashed a torch in the wide, dark face of the broom-maker and signed to Underwood to let him sit up. "You've given me a lot of trouble," he said sadly. "Why do you worry the lady? She don't like dead stoats."

"Her don't belong on the moor," said the little man sulkily. "Her should bide in her own place."

"The old gentleman, too. You've worried him with your nasty noises. It won't do."

"He should leave the land quiet. 'Tis none of hisn."

"They are quiet. Quite quiet. They've never done any harm."

"Fie, fie! That they have surely, master. They do devise to dig up old Dragon's grave. 'Tis a wicked, harmful thing."

"It don't hurt you if they see what's inside the old mound."

"Nay, it don't hurt Giles. Giles was here before they come, me an mine, ten thousand year and all. Giles will be here when they be gone their way. But 'tis evil to pry into old Dragon's grave. There's death in it, master."

"Whoever died there in your time?" Reggie said quickly.

"Nay, none to my time. But there's death in it, for sure. Bid 'em go their ways, master, and leave the moor quiet."

"They'll do you no harm, my lad. And you mustn't bother them. No more of these tricks of yours, Giles, or we'll have to put you in gaol."

The little man squeaked and took hold of his knees and stroked them. "Ah, you wouldn't be so hard. I do belong on the moor, me and mine. I don't break no laws."

"Oh, yes, you do, hunting these folks. You ought to be in gaol now, my lad. You've made a lot of trouble. If there's any more of it you'll be shut up in a little close cell, not walking in the wind on the moor."

"Nay, master, you wouldn't do it to a poor man."

"You be good, then. I know all about you, you know. If the Restharrow folks have any more trouble it's gaol for Giles."

The little man breathed deep. "The old Dragon can have them for Giles."

"Don't forget. By the way, where's the thing you made the noise with?"

The little man grinned, and pulled out of his coat a bent piece of wood at the end of a cord. When he whirled it round his head it made the whistling roar of a gale.

Mr. Fortune came back to his bedroom by the window, and slept the sleep of the just. He did not reach the breakfast table till Joseph and Isabel were nearly finished. "All my apologies. I had rather a busy night." Miss Woodall hoped he had not been disturbed. "No, not disturbed. Interested." Mr. Larkin quivered with curiosity. He thought Mr. Fortune had gone out.

"Out on the moor at night?" Miss Woodall shuddered. "I wouldn't do that for anything."

Mr. Fortune tapped his third egg. "Why should you? But no one will meddle with you, Miss Woodall. The fellow that made the trouble won't bother you any more."

"Who was it?" she said eagerly.

"Well, I shouldn't worry. One of the local people suffering from superstition. He thought it was dangerous to dig up the old barrow. He wanted to scare you off. But I've scared him, and he's seen the evil of his ways. I think we'll give him a free pardon. He wouldn't have hurt you. You can rule him out and get on with the excavation."

"But that's magnificent, perfectly magnificent," Mr. Larkin chirped. "How quick too! You've really done wonderfully well." He twittered thanks.

"You're quite sure about it, Mr. Fortune?" said Miss Woodall.

"Nothing more to be afraid of, Miss Woodall."

"How splendid!" She smiled at him. "Oh, you don't know what a relief it is."

Mr. Larkin plunged into plans for the excavation. Old White at the Priors had promised to let him have men at any time before harvest. No time to lose.

Better see the old man at once. Why not that morning? He did hope Mr. Fortune would stay and watch the excavation. Most interesting. Mr. Fortune shook his head. Perhaps he might be allowed to come down and see the result.

"That's a promise, sir. An engagement," Mr. Larkin cried. "We shall hold you to that, shan't we, my dear?"

"Of course," said Miss Woodall.

They went off together to see old White—it seemed impossible for Mr. Larkin to make any arrangements by himself. Reggie was left in the house waiting for his car. He wandered into the study. Everything had been tidied away. Everything but the books was locked up. "Careful souls," Reggie murmured, and paused by a waste-paper basket. It had some crumpled stuff in it. He smoothed out the catalogue of a draper's sale. Some articles had been marked by a line under a letter. He ran his eye over the pages. TAPHONOIGEIN he read, and heard the horn of his car. He dropped the catalogue back in the basket, and slid out of the study as the door bell rang. The maid coming to tell him his car was at the door, found him in his bedroom writing a letter.

The big car purred over the heath, passed a man pursuing butterflies, slowed and stopped. The chauffeur went to examine his back tyres. The passenger leaned out and watched. When the car rolled on again there was something white by the roadside. The butterfly hunter crossed the road and picked up a letter. The passenger glanced back. "Now let her out, Sam," he said.

In the late afternoon, the Hon. Sidney Lomas, making an end of his day's work in Scotland Yard, was surprised by the arrival of Mr. Fortune. "Oh, Reginald, this is so sudden," he complained. "Finished already? Has Isabel no charms?"

"Some of your weaker tea would do me no harm," said Mr. Fortune. "Isabel's a very interestin' woman, Lomas. Joseph also has points of interest. They're both happy now."

"Cleared it up, have you? What was it?"

"It was a son of the soil. Very attractive person. Bushman type. Probably a descendant of some prehistoric race. You do find 'em about in odd corners. Family lurking on that moor for centuries. He had a notion if anybody opened the old Dragon barrow, death came out of it. Probably a primeval belief. So he set himself to scare off Joseph and Isabel—tokens of death for 'em—the bull-roarer at nights."

"What in wonder is a bull-roarer?"

"Oh, a bit of wood rather like a boomerang. You twirl it round on the end of a string and it makes the deuce of a row. Lots of savages use them to scare off outsiders and evil spirits. Very curious survival is Giles. Well, we caught him at it and bade him desist. He's in a holy funk of prison, and he's going to be good. And Joseph and Isabel are getting on with the excavation."

Lomas smiled. "So it was just the local rustic playing the fool. Reginald, my friend, I enjoy the rare and exquisite pleasure of saying I told you so."

"Yes." Reggie drank his tea. "Yes. Tell me some more, Lomas. Why did

Joseph and Isabel go down to this place off the map and get keen on excavating its barrow? Lots of other nice barrows."

"Do you think there's something special in this one?"

"No. I think there's something special in Joseph and Isabel. I found in the house a second-hand bookseller's catalogue. Some letters in it were underlined: SKUTHAI. Probably more. I hadn't time to go on. Joseph came in, and afterwards the catalogue vanished."

"Lots of people mark catalogues," Lomas shrugged.

"Yes. But not so that the marks make a word."

"Word?"

"Lomas, my dear old thing, I thought you had a classical education. SKUTHAI is Greek for Scythians, and in Athens the policemen were Scythians."

"Oh, this is fantastic."

"Well, to-day I found a draper's catalogue in a waste-paper basket. Letters marked as before. TAPHONOIGEIN. Probably more, again. But that's two words. Taphon oigein. To open the tomb. Either Joseph or Isabel is making very secret communications with somebody about excavating that barrow. Why?"

"You do run on," Lomas protested. "But what are you starting from? These people have been doing their damnedest to get the police to look into their affairs. If either of them was up to anything shady, that's the last thing they'd want."

"There's about a dozen answers to that," said Reggie wearily. "Have some. Suppose something suspicious happens later. Mr. Lomas will say, 'Oh, nothing in it, these people must be all right, they came and asked us to look into their affairs.' Why, you're saying that already. In the second place, both of them may not be in it; perhaps one of them knew the other was going to the police and played for safety by going too. Thirdly, they were both rattled, one of them may have thought somebody knew more than was convenient, and wanted to make sure. Fourthly and lastly, my brethren, whatever the job is, it has something to do with opening this barrow. They're both dead keen on that. They wanted to make sure they could do it without bother."

"Very ingenious, Reginald. And partially convincing," Lomas frowned. "If you'll tell me what they can get by excavating a barrow, I might begin to believe you."

"Nothing," said Reggie, "nothing. That's why it's interesting."

"My dear fellow! You have too much imagination."

"Oh lord, no. None. I'm the natural man. I get nerves when things aren't nice and normal. Hence my modest fame. But imaginative! Oh, Mr. Lomas, sir, how can you?"

"Well, well. Time will show," Lomas rose. "If any corpses lie out on the shining sand, I'll let you know."

"That'll be all right," said Reggie cheerfully. He did not move. "I left Underwood down there."

"The deuce you did!" Lomas stared and sat down again. "And what's he doing?"

"He's catching butterflies. He's also finding out whether Joseph or Isabel posts any catalogues and where they go to."

"Confound you, he mustn't do that on his own. If you want postal correspondence examined we must apply to the Postmaster-General. You ought to know that, Fortune."

"My dear old thing, I do. I also know country post offices. Don't be so beastly official."

"This is a serious matter."

"Yes. Yes, that's what I've been trying to indicate," Mr. Fortune smiled. "Look here. These beauties go down to a place off the map for no decent reason but that it's off the map. Joseph could write his silly books anywhere. Did Isabel take Joseph, or Joseph take Isabel? Their stories don't agree. Joseph is affectionate and Isabel coy. Joseph watches her jealously and Isabel is meek. When they've been there some time they get mighty keen on digging up a barrow. Lots of barrows in lots of places, but they must have the lonely one at Stoke Abbas. Then we find them dealing in messages too secret for a letter in plain English. One message something about police, another about opening the barrow. Well, there's going to be dirty work at the cross roads, old thing."

"But it's all fanciful, Fortune. Why the deuce shouldn't they write letters? What's the use of putting a message in Greek?"

"They're all alone. Each of 'em can see all the letters the other gets, perhaps all the letters the other posts. But a catalogue wouldn't be noticed. If one of 'em don't know Greek the marked letters would be absolutely secret. SKUTHAI didn't suggest anything to the Chief of the Criminal Investigation Department."

"But what do you suppose the game is?"

"No, dear"; Mr. Fortune smiled. "I have no imagination. You've got all the facts. Oh, not quite. I did a little distant snapshot of Joseph and Isabel." He laid a roll of film on the table. "Get the faces enlarged big. Some of your fellows might know 'em. Good-bye. I've got to dine with my young niece—the one that married a gunner. Always merry and bright. Very exhausting."

After which nothing happened for a couple of weeks. Lomas when he met Mr. Fortune in their clubs made sarcastic remarks about the Greek language and the use of the imagination. Then Joseph Larkin wrote to Mr. Fortune that the excavation was nearly complete, urging him to come and see the result. Mr. Fortune told Lomas over the telephone and Lomas made scornful noises. "I'm going," said Mr. Fortune.

"You've got a lot of time to waste," said the telephone.

But three days afterwards, while the car stood at his door to take him to Stoke Abbas, the telephone spoke again, "Hallo, Fortune. Are you up? Marvellous. Just come round here."

Lomas was in an early morning temper. "Some more crazy stuff about that Stoke Abbas case." He stared at Reggie with a bilious eye. "I put the post office people on to it, more fool me. Here's a report. A bookseller's catalogue was

posted on Monday with a number of letters from Restharrow. It was addressed to Miss George, 715 Sand Street, Bournemouth. In it a number of letters were marked, a, b, four e's, g, h, two i's, l, m, n, p, r, two s's, t and u."

"As you say," Reggie groaned.

"What do you mean?"

"You said more fool you. Quite so. Why didn't you leave it to Underwood? He'd have got it all right. And I told him to give us the letters in order."

"Confound you, we can't tamper with the mail."

"My dear old thing, you're too good for this world." Reggie took pen and paper. "Say it again. A, b——" He wrote down ABEEEEGHIILMNPRSSTU, lit a cigar and pondered. "You moral men give me a lot of trouble. Here you are. PRESBUS GAMEIN THELEI. And very interesting too. That clears up several points."

"What the deuce does it mean?"

"What did you learn at school, Lomas? I've often wondered. It means 'The old man desires to marry.' Yes, I thought so. I told you you had all the facts. You remember Joseph said Isabel had had a classical education. Not like you, Lomas. She's sending the messages. She's caught Joseph. It's opening out. Now tell your priceless post office folks to report the order of the letters in future. I don't want to work cryptograms because you've got a conscience. And send somebody to look into Miss George, of 715 Sand Street, good and quick. I'm going down to Stoke Abbas. They've opened the barrow. Oh, by the way, what about the snapshots?"

"They enlarged well enough. Nobody here knows the people."

"Not known to the police? Well, well. Get a snap of Miss George. Good-bye."

That evening Mr. Fortune stood on Dragon Hill with Joseph and Isabel. Half a dozen labourers rested on their spades and grinned. The long mound of the barrow was gone. It lay in scattered heaps of grey sand around the cromlech which it had covered, three upright stones supporting one flat. Under that flat stone, as a man might lie under a table, lay a skeleton. Reggie knelt down and took up the skull. "Ah, genuine antique," he gave a sigh of relief.

Miss Woodall shuddered. "He looks like a monkey."

"No, I wouldn't say that," said Reggie gently, still intent on the bones.

"I am convinced he was a Phœnician," Mr. Larkin announced.

"Oh, lord, no," said Reggie. He was not interested in Mr. Larkin's theory that everything old was Phœnician. He was thinking that this man of the barrow with his long head and his big cheekbones and his short wide body must have been much like Giles of the hovel on the moor. An ancestor perhaps; five thousand years ago the family of Giles the broom-maker were kings on the sandhills. But Mr. Larkin went on talking about Phœnicians. . . . "Yes, very interesting," said Reggie wearily, and stood up.

"Poor dead man," Miss Woodall sighed. "He looks so lonely."

"My dear," said Mr. Larkin affectionately. "What pretty thoughts you have." They walked back to Restharrow, and he proved again that the skeleton was

Phœnician, and it was most gratifying, and he was going to give it to the British Museum, and Reggie was bored.

In that condition he remained for the duration of his visit to Restharrow. When Mr. Larkin was not talking about Phœnicians, or (worse still) reading extracts from his new book on *The Origins of Our World*, he was (worst of all) being affectionate with Miss Woodall. A mawkish little man. But there was no mystery about them. The great book was published, the barrow was opened. Mr. Larkin was going to write a pamphlet about it, close it down again, marry Miss Woodall, and take her off to South Africa, where he meant to find many more traces of the Phœnicians. Reggie wished them joy, and as soon as he decently could, went back to London.

Two days afterwards Lomas found him having breakfast in his bedroom, a rare thing, a sure sign of depression. "My dear fellow, are you ill?"

"Yes, very ill. Go away. I don't like you. You look distressin'ly cheerful, and it's very bad for me."

"There's been another message. TUCHEAPELTHE."

"Don't gargle, spell it," said Mr. Fortune peevishly. "Yes TUCHE APELTHE. Two words. 'Fortune has gone away.' Very kind of her to notice it."

Lomas smiled. "So Isabel wanted Miss George to know Mr. Fortune had gone away. That's interesting. And we've got something about Miss George, Reginald. She isn't a woman. Oh no. She's a middle-aged man, who calls himself George Raymond. He don't live at 715 Sand Street. That's a little shop where they take in letters to be called for. George Raymond has lodgings the other end of the town, and lives very quiet. My fellows have a notion he's American."

"Fortune has gone away," Reggie murmured. "I wonder if Fortune ought to have stayed. No. Nothing would happen with me in the house. I wonder if anything will happen."

"What, are you giving up the case?" Lomas laughed.

"No. There's a case all right. But I don't know whether we'll ever get it. Joseph and Isabel are going to marry, and be off to South Africa."

Lomas was much amused. "And that's the end of it all! My poor Reginald! What a climax! Mr. Fortune's own particular mystery. All orange blossoms and wedding cake."

"Yes. With Miss George as best man. I hope your fellows are looking sharp after Miss George."

"He's giving no trouble. They won't miss him. We've got a photograph too. Nobody knows him, but we'll have it enlarged."

"Well, watch him."

"Oh, certainly; anything to oblige. Have they asked you to the wedding, Reginald? You really ought to send them a present."

Lomas says that Reggie then snarled.

Two weeks passed. Reggie received an angry letter from Mr. Larkin stating that the British Museum had refused the skeleton, and he was replacing it in the barrow, and publishing the full facts to inform the public of the blind prejudice of the official world against his work. He was leaving immediately for South

Africa, where he had no doubt of obtaining conclusive proof of the theory of the Phœnician origin of all civilisation. Mrs. Larkin sent Mr. Fortune kind thoughts and best wishes.

Mr. Fortune moved uneasily in his chair. "And they lived happily ever after," said Mr. Fortune. "Kind thoughts and best wishes. Dear Isabel." He rang up Lomas to ask how Miss George was getting on.

"Many thanks for kind enquiries," said the voice of Lomas. "Nothing doing. Not by George. He lives the life of a maiden lady. What did you say?"

"I said damn," said Mr. Fortune.

That evening came a letter from Sergeant Underwood. He was plaintive. He thought Mr. Fortune ought to know there seemed nothing more to do at Stoke Abbas. The barrow was being covered up. The servants were leaving Restharrow. Mr. Larkin and Miss Woodall were going to be married at the registry office to-morrow, and the next day sailing from Southampton. Mr. Fortune spent a restless night.

He was fretting in the library of his dreariest club next morning, when the telephone called him to Scotland Yard. Lomas was in conference with Superintendent Bell. Lomas was brisk and brusque. "They've lost George Raymond, Fortune. He left Bournemouth this morning with a suit-case. He went to Southampton, put it in the cloakroom, went into one of the big shops, and hasn't been seen since. When they found they had lost him they went back to the station. His suit-case was gone."

"Well, well," said Mr. Fortune. "You have been and gone and done it, Lomas." But he smiled.

"What do you want us to do now?"

"Oh, you might watch the Cape boat. Make sure G. Raymond isn't on the Cape boat when she sails. If you can."

"I've arranged for all that. Anything else?"

"You might give me a time-table," said Mr. Fortune. "I'm going down to the long barrow."

"Good gad!" said Lomas.

As darkness fell on the moors that night, Mr. Fortune and Superintendent Bell stopped a hired car a mile away from Stoke Abbas, and walked on through the shadows. When they came near the shrubberies of Restharrow, a voice spoke softly from behind a clump of gorse. "Got your wire, sir. All clear here. They were married this morning. Both in the house now. Servants all gone. No one else been here."

Reggie sat down beside Sergeant Underwood. "Seen anyone strange about?"

"I did fancy I saw some one going up towards the barrow a while ago."

"Work up that way quietly. Don't show yourself."

Sergeant Underwood vanished into the night. Bell and Reggie sat waiting while the stars grew dim in a black sky. The door of Restharrow opened; and a bar of light shot out. They heard voices. "A beautiful night," said Mr. Larkin. "The most beautiful night that ever happened," said Mrs. Larkin. They came

out. "Let us go up to the dear old barrow," she said. "I shall always love it, you know. It brought us together, my dearest."

"My dear child," Mr. Larkin chirped. "You are full of pretty thoughts."

They walked on arm in arm.

A long way behind, Reggie and Superintendent Bell followed.

When they came to the crest of the hill, where the turned sand was white in the gloom, "Dear place," said Mrs. Larkin. "How sweet it is here. I think that old Phœnician was lucky, don't you, Joseph dearest?"

A man rose up behind Joseph dearest and grasped his head. There was no struggle, no noise, a little swaying, a little scuffle of feet in the sand, and Joseph was laid on his back and Isabel knelt beside him. The other man turned aside. There was the sound of a spade. Then Sergeant Underwood arrived on his back. They went down together. Bell charged up the hill to catch Mrs. Larkin as she rushed to help. But Underwood already had his man handcuffed and jerked him on to his feet.

Reggie came at his leisure and took a pad of cotton wool from Mr. Larkin's face. "Who is your friend with the chloroform, Mrs. Larkin?" he said gently.

"You devil," she panted. "Don't say a word, George."

"Oh, yes, I know he's George," said Reggie, and flashed a torch on the man.

Sergeant Underwood gasped. Sergeant Underwood stared from the man in handcuffs to the man on the ground. "Good Lord! Which have I got, sir?" For the man who stood was of the same small plump size as Mr. Larkin, grey-haired, clean-shaven too, dressed in the like dark clothes.

"Yes, a good make-up. That was necessary, wasn't it, Mrs. Larkin? Well, we'd better get the real Mr. Larkin to hospital." He whistled across the night and flashed his torch and the hired car surged up to the foot of the hill. Mr. Larkin was carried to it, it bore him and Reggie away and behind them Mrs. Larkin and George, handcuffed wrist to wrist, tramped long miles to a police station.

A little man lying in the heather on the hill watched them go. "Old Dragon hath taken her," he chuckled. "Giles knew he would have her," and he capered home to his hut on the moor.

Superintendent Bell coming into the coffee-room of an inn at Wimborne next morning, saw Mr. Fortune dealing heartily with grilled salmon. "You had a bad night, sir," he said with sympathy.

"Yes. Poor Joseph was very upset. Spiritually and physically. Can you wonder? It's disheartening to a husband when his wife attempts murder on the wedding night. Destroys confidence."

"Confidence! They're a pair of beauties, the woman and this chap George. I suppose they were going to bury poor Larkin alive."

"Yes. Yes. He wouldn't have been very lively, of course."

"I should say not. What do you think that fellow had on him, sir?"

"Well, chloroform, of course. A pistol, I suppose. Probably some vitriol."

"That's it." Superintendent Bell gazed at him with reverent admiration. "It's wonderful how you know men, Mr. Fortune."

Mr. Fortune smiled and passed Bell his plate of nectarines. "I knew they'd

think of everything. That's their weakness. Just a little too careful. But it's a beautiful plan. Grave all ready, nice light soil, spades handy, chloroform the old man, pour vitriol over him, bury him. Not likely anyone would open that barrow again in a century. If they did, only an unknown corpse inside. Nobody missing. No chance anybody would think the corpse was Mr. Larkin who sailed for South Africa alive and kicking. And George and Isabel are Mr. and Mrs. Larkin and live happy ever after on the Larkin fortune. If only she hadn't taken such pains about a grave, if only she hadn't bothered about Giles, if only they hadn't been so clever with their secret messages, they'd have brought it off. Poor old Joseph, though. He's very cut up. He fears Isabel never really loved him. But he don't want to give evidence against her, poor old thing."

"I don't wonder," said Bell. "He'll look a proper fool in the witness-box."

"Yes. Yes. Not a wise old boy. But human, Bell, quite human."

There was a sprightly noise without. Lomas came tripping in, and on the heels of Lomas a solid man with the face of a Roman emperor. "Reginald, my dear fellow, all my congratulations," Lomas chuckled. "You told me so. You really did. Splendid case. This is Mr. Bingham Jackson of the American service."

"I want to know you, sir," said Mr. Bingham Jackson magisterially. "This is right good work. We wanted those two and we wanted 'em bad."

"When Mr. Jackson saw your photographs of George and Isabel he called for champagne," Lomas chuckled.

"Yes. I thought somebody ought to know them," said Mr. Fortune. "I thought they weren't new to the business."

"No, sir." Mr. Jackson nodded impressively. "Not new. Isabel and George Stultz are American citizens of some reputation. We shall be right glad to have them back. They eliminated Mrs. Stanton Johnson of Philadelphia and got off with her collection of antique jewels. They used morphia and a cellar then. One of our best crimes."

"This is going to hush up Joseph's trouble," said Mr. Fortune with satisfaction. "You'll claim their extradition for murder?"

"Sure thing. We didn't get in on our case early like you. They brought the murder off our side. You always had 'em on a string. But I want to say, Mr. Fortune, I do admire your work. You have flair."

"Not nice people, you know," said Reggie dreamily. "I get nerves when people aren't nice and ordinary."

"Some nerves," said Mr. Jackson.

Sir Basil Thomson

THE HANOVER COURT MURDER

from Mr. Pepper, Investigator

John Castle, 1925

Permission to reprint is granted by the author

A whole week had passed since Mr. Pepper—and the small boy—had spoilt Mr. Cohen's scheme; and no one had come near the office. My Chief spent the time in perfecting his scientific apparatus which had not been called into use since my short association with him. It was therefore with immense satisfaction that an opportunity for exercising Mr. Pepper's higher art was thrown into my way.

An acquaintance at my club, finding me in the smoking-room when other people were working, took the chair opposite to mine and said, "By the way, Jones, I hear that you dabble in detective work; that you have discovered a wonderful Yankee who wipes the eye of Scotland Yard. Why don't you make your name by solving this Hanover Court case?"

"I've never heard of it."

"No; it hasn't got into the papers yet, but it will."

He had himself heard of it only that morning. His landlord had a sister who let lodgings in Hanover Court. She had opened the luggage of a tenant who had gone abroad owing rent and had been horrified by finding in one of the trunks what appeared to be the remains of a dismembered human body. She had run at once to her brother, who consulted my friend as to what she ought to do. He took the usual course of advising that she should report the matter to the police, but, as far as he knew, she had not yet done so because she had made the discovery only that morning at breakfast-time. He gave me her address.

I seized my hat and took a taxi to Hanover Court. I found the poor landlady wringing her hands. "You heard of the case through my brother, sir? Well, I am glad that you've come in time. I was just going off to the police, but it will ruin my business to have the police messing about the house, asking me a lot of questions and calling in the Coroner. They would make me appear as a witness at the inquest and the papers would publish the address. Then what chance would there be of the best class of people taking rooms where there's been a murder? It is not respectable. Now if you'll take away the trunk and take all responsibility I shall breathe freely. Of course, if there *has* been a murder I must stand by it, but you will ferret it all out and I hope that I shall hear no more about it."

I agreed to everything on the condition that she gave me all the information she possessed. She showed me the trunk which stood on the landing of the second floor. I opened it with trembling fingers. It contained a number of packages wrapped in dirty newspaper and enveloped in part of what appeared to be an old army blanket. I satisfied myself that they contained bones, probably human bones, and with her assistance carried the trunk downstairs for removal to our office. In the meantime she told me the story of her lodger.

"He was what they call an eccentric, sir—always going off without notice and writing letters asking me to reserve his room and take care of his luggage. He always sent me money for the rent while he was away. He would write from all sorts of place—Naples, Egypt, Athens, and one letter I had came from Peru. I never knew him pack anything for his journeys. All he said was that he was called away on business and would I be sure and feed his cat?"

"You haven't told me his name, Mrs. Auger."

"To tell you the truth, I had almost forgotten it. We always called him 'The Doctor' because when he came to me five years ago he said something about being in the medical profession. But his real name was Allen—Henry Allen."

"That sounds English enough."

"Oh, there was nothing foreign about him except his hair. He never seemed to get it cut—his hair and his eccentricity—for foreigners *are* eccentric, don't you think so, Mr. Meddlesome-Jones? His age? Well, that would be hard to say—something between thirty-five and fifty, I should say."

"Had he no friends, no visitors?"

"That's the peculiar thing. He had none. No, I am wrong there. About three years ago a lady did call and ask for Dr. Allen. I asked her what name I should give. She said, 'Don't trouble; just tell me what floor he's on, and I'll find him myself.' And up she walked, but of course he must have heard her voice. She soon came down again and said he wasn't there. Then I went up myself, and of course, there he was, hiding under the bed. He said nothing to me, but I can't help thinking that that lady was his wife. She never came again, not to my knowledge."

"Did he get no letters?"

"Yes, once a month, always on the 2nd unless it was a Sunday, there would be a fat registered letter addressed 'Henry Allen, Esq.'—no doctor on the envelope. I think it was from a bank, but I don't remember which. He always paid his bill that morning for the whole month. He never had a meal in the house, not even his breakfast, but he used to bring back a little meat for his cat. Where did he go all day? Well, sir, that's more than I can tell you. On weekdays I would hear him coming downstairs regular at nine—I could have set my clock by him. If he passed me he would say 'Good morning,' but nothing else. On Sundays he would lie in bed all the morning, and go out punctually at twelve. Oh, he was eccentric, but not the sort to commit a cold-blooded murder; for it is cold-blooded, Mr. Meddlesome-Jones, whatever you may say, to cut up a person into little bits like that, now isn't it? He had no books in his room and he didn't

leave a scrap of writing behind him. What he did all day is a mystery to me."

"When did you see him last?"

"It would be back in April. Yes, it is just three months. He just walked out of the house as usual and when I went up to do his room I found that he had packed everything away in his trunks. 'Off again, I suppose,' I said to myself, and I was right—only this time I had no letter and he hadn't paid me for the room. I didn't think very much of that—he had been behind with the rent before. I thought that the money would come. But then as the weeks went by and I had no letter I began to get anxious and I thought I had better see what he had left behind him. There wasn't a scrap of writing in any of the trunks—only old clothes and—and what you saw."

"But the letters from the bank?"

"That's the peculiar thing. Whenever he went off those letters stopped coming. There hasn't been a letter since he left. Do you think he can have committed suicide after the murder?"

"We have got to find out first if there has been a murder, Mrs. Auger. I suppose there has been no one missing in the neighbourhood?"

She thought for some moments and then shook her head. "But I'm sure that lady who came to see him was his wife," she said.

"Why?"

"Well, she had a masterful, disagreeable way with her and he got under the bed to hide from her. A man would never do that with anybody except his wife." I forbore to evoke any confidences of Mrs. Auger's own experience of the married state.

"And if she was his wife, what then?"

"Why, it might be her that's in the trunk."

The taxi driver knew nothing of what his burden contained. For an extra shilling he helped me upstairs with it into the office where my Chief's face became a mark of interrogation until the man was gone. Then I told him the story and opened the trunk. I never saw him so much moved before. He laid the bones out on the table as if they were jewels. I noticed that desiccated flesh was adhering to some of them; it was quite inoffensive. At the bottom of the trunk was the skull carefully wrapped in newspaper by itself. We carried them into the laboratory and cleared a table for them. While he was arranging them in order I committed to paper what Mrs. Auger had told me.

Now, if my Chief had a fault it was that he tried to do too much himself rather than call in the expert. My instinct would have been to call in a surgeon or an anatomist and let him express his opinion on the bones, but when I ventured to suggest this my Chief flew up in the air. "What does your surgeon know of plastic reconstruction?" he said, and not knowing what plastic reconstruction was I said that I didn't know. "Well," he said, "I am going to show you."

It was a great opportunity for me. When I was admitted to the laboratory the bones were disposed on the table like a complete skeleton. My Chief's first words were disconcerting. "Some of the bones are missing," he said, "but the

curious thing is that the body was deformed. That ought to make our work easier, but it is a very remarkable case. This woman had the left leg three inches shorter than the right and the right arm two inches shorter than the left. She must have had a very odd appearance.

"We'll soon see what she looked like," said my Chief, confidently, as he manipulated wax in a pan of warm water. The skull was secured in a wooden vice clamped to the table. With extraordinary dexterity he pinched off little cones from the lump of wax in the pan, warmed them over a spirit lamp, and stuck them all over the skull. Very gradually he began to build up a face; and after an hour's work it became under his skilled manipulation a human face certainly, but a face that one could only see in a nightmare. With her bodily deformities in addition she might have made a good living at a show.

"There," he said, "is the murdered woman as she was in life." I had it on the tip of my tongue to say, "Then she deserved to die," but I restrained myself in time, and I suggested that Mrs. Auger should be called to the office to identify her with Mrs. Allen. But my Chief thought that the time had not come for that. "Let us find the murderer and confront him with his victim," he said. "In nine cases out of ten he is so startled that he makes a full confession."

"And if he does, what then? Surely we should have to hand him over to the police."

"Yes," he mused, "but in a case of felony it is the duty of any citizen to arrest the felon. You will make the arrest; I will call in the reporters, and then we will ring up your wonderful Scotland Yard." There was the most subtle irony in his tone. He covered the remains with a sheet, and we sat down to consider the best way of finding Henry Allen. I was for advertising in the Agony Columns of *The Times*, the *Daily Telegraph* and the *Daily Mail*. "Henry Allen. Come back and all will be forgiven."

"He would plead at his trial that he had been promised a free pardon."

"Then why not something like this? 'If Henry Allen, late of 17 Hanover Court, will communicate with Pepper and Jones, Adelphi, London, he will hear of something to his advantage.'" My Chief snorted with contempt; I feared that it might be because for the first time I had dared to couple our two names.

"Do you really suppose that a man who goes in daily fear that his crime will be discovered would reply to an advertisement?"

"Well, you see them in the newspapers every day when lawyers want to get hold of a man. Someone must reply to them or they wouldn't put them in."

"No, Mr. Meddlesome-Jones; if we use the newspapers we will proceed in quite a different way. I have there," he pointed to his card index cabinet, "the names and addresses of the principal newspapers of every country in the world—daily and weekly. We would prepare a little news paragraph, a snappy little thing of how an Englishman named Henry Allen, had been named as residuary legatee to an eccentric lady who died leaving a million and a half, and that when the sole executor, Mr. Pepper," there was no mention of Meddlesome-Jones in the proposed paragraph, "wrote to the happy legatee he found that he had gone abroad leaving no address and the letter was returned by the Post Office. Under

the provisions of the will, if Henry Allen fails to claim his legacy within six months, the whole of the money goes to found a Home for Starving Cats in London. We would have this translated into every language and sent out through one of the press agencies. Everyone likes to read about unclaimed money."

"Wouldn't you be inundated with false claimants?"

"All the better. We would confront them all with the corpse first, then with Mrs. Auger, and they would be glad to get away alive."

It seemed to me to be a very dilatory method of procedure, but my Chief must have adopted it because a week or so later reporters connected with the press agency began to hang about the office and stop me in the street. This annoyed my Chief very much. It appeared that he had made a confidential arrangement with the head of the Agency, that the paragraph should not be released to any newspaper in the United Kingdom, because he would have to confess that there was no eccentric millionaire lady in the case at all. But the paragraph must have appeared in foreign newspapers because later we received begging letters from abroad. An Englishwoman wrote from Leghorn to say that if Henry Allen failed to appear, there were more starving cats in Leghorn than there could possibly be in London, that they kept her awake at night by their me-owing, and that she would be glad to establish a home for them if she might have part of the money. A man signing himself 'Henry Allen' wrote from Cooktown in Queensland, asking for the expenses necessary for him to come to England to establish his claim. Another wrote from Salt Lake City to say that though he was known locally as Richard Doherty, he was satisfied that as his mother's name was Allen he was the person named in the will, and he would be thankful if a payment could be made on account; and a lady, writing from Buenos Ayres in the name of Mary Allen, claimed the legacy on the ground that when she was a girl her schoolfellows always called her 'Henry.' But of the real Henry Allen not a word.

My Chief was becoming impatient. He was engaged on several cases at the time and the remains of the murdered woman, taking up nearly half the laboratory, were in his way. He had added chestnut hair to his reconstruction of the head, and colour to the cheeks; in her reconstructed state she must certainly have been very trying to live with, even when covered with a sheet. One morning he said to me, "Mr. Meddlesome-Jones, we are not getting on with this Allen case. Why don't you bring the landlady down to identify the victim? Then we might get on."

Mrs. Auger did not take at all kindly to my suggestion. She reminded me that our agreement was that she should not be troubled with the case any more, and I had some difficulty in getting her to the office. When I drew back the sheet she uttered a piercing scream and fell into a chair. "Oh! My heart!" she sobbed. "My poor heart!" and she tried to clutch that organ in her anatomy.

"You recognise her, Mrs. Auger? Is she like the wife?"

"She is like nothing on earth," she gasped, "and after seeing her I shall be ill for a week." It was a great disappointment.

I persuaded my Chief at last to take a photograph of the head, and give it to an illustrated daily paper for circulation as a missing person about whom information was desired. He took the photograph, but ten minutes before I started with it for the newspaper office in Fleet Street, an event occurred which entirely changed the course of our enquiry. Mrs. Auger reappeared.

She produced a picture postcard, bearing the Genoa postmark, from Henry Allen himself, saying that he would be in London within the week. "And now," she said, "what am I to say to him when he asks for his trunk? I can't say that the police have taken it, can I? You had better pack up all those bones in the newspapers just as he left them and bring back the trunk." To this proposition, of course, my Chief would not agree. He pointed out that, according to the law, Mrs. Auger herself was bound to arrest him as soon as he set foot in her house.

"Arrest him?" she exclaimed aghast. "How can a woman arrest a man?"

"The law knows no difference between men and women, Mrs. Auger," I said. "Women serve on juries; there are women police. All you have to do is to lay your hand on his shoulder and say, 'Henry Allen, I arrest you for the wilful murder of a woman unknown, and I must caution you that anything you say will be taken down in writing, and will be used against you at your trial.' Then write down what he says, locking him up in his room, and telephone to Mr. Pepper, Central 1202."

"I could never do such a thing, Mr. Meddlesome-Jones, were he a murderer three times over. You'll have to do this yourself."

I looked at Mr. Pepper and Mr. Pepper looked at me. It seemed to me that this was the moment for calling in the regular police who are paid for doing these things, but I did not dare to say so. I had an uncomfortable feeling that I had read somewhere about a man being charged as an accessory after the fact, and I had a horrible presentiment that Pepper and I would find ourselves standing in the dock at the Old Bailey. We dismissed Mrs. Auger with some difficulty on the plea that we had to consider our position. There were still four days before us. Mr. Pepper was equally perturbed. The only solution which he could suggest was that I should wait at Mrs. Auger's door day after day and as soon as Allen appeared accost him, and induce him to come to the office to be confronted with his victim. We would then be guided by events. If he displayed signs of guilt we might go so far as to telephone to the police. It was the first time I had ever known him to contemplate lowering his dignity as a scientific detective, and I honoured him for it though I cannot say that I liked the rôle he had assigned to me. An extraordinary coincidence saved me. I owed my rescue to the same club acquaintance who had first introduced me to the man whom I shall continue to regard as the greatest detective of the age.

My friend was lunching at a table for two. As I passed him he sprang up and introduced me to his guest, a middle-aged man with a beard turning grey, and asked me to join them. In the course of conversation it appeared that his guest was the head of a well-known medical school in London, and that he was at the moment of my appearance relating an unpleasant incident at the school. My friend asked him to begin the story again. "Mr. Meddlesome-Jones," he was

good enough to say, "is the very man to advise you. He is associated with the best detective brains in London, besides being himself a man of very wide experience in crime." It was rather oddly expressed, but my friend meant well.

"But I don't want to call in the police—at any rate until we know more."

"Bless you, Mr. Meddlesome-Jones has no connection with Scotland Yard. He is an 'amateur'—if I may say so—a brilliant amateur."

Thus reassured, the doctor told his story. A young man, an assistant to the custodian of the anatomical school, had disappeared two days before. His character was exemplary; he handled no money; as far as the custodian knew, he had no private worries. He had put away the 'subjects' on the Monday evening and had remarked to the custodian that he thought it looked like rain. At eight next morning he should have returned to work for he was always punctual. It was a busy day and when the students arrived at ten everything was late; some of them complained to him, the doctor, that if their 'subjects' were not arranged for them, they could not expect to do well in the approaching examination. He sent for the custodian, and it was thus for the first time that he learned that John was missing. They sent to his home to enquire the cause; he had not been home. The whole day passed without news of him. The obvious course was to report his disappearance to the police, but, as we could easily understand, it would be very disturbing to the young minds of the students then in the throes of preparing for examination, and destructive to the morale of the establishment to have detectives practically in charge of the place, questioning everybody and poking their noses into every part of the building. He wished to avoid it if possible. But there was one solution that had occurred to him—he scarcely liked to breathe it—which would make the intervention of the police inevitable—if the poor lad had been the victim of foul play, in the building itself —then——

"But why should you suspect that?"

"Well, I don't quite know. Perhaps it was that when I was going my rounds a few evenings ago I heard loud words coming from the laboratory. All the students had left for the day. I went to the door and I heard the custodian speaking very sharply to the boy, and he was answering much in the same tone. It was one of those quarrels about the details of duty in which a principal had better not interfere, and I went away. But I confess that it left a disagreeable impression on my mind. The custodian always seemed to me an excellent servant—been with us for years—but he is short-tempered and I confess that his language on that occasion was rather a shock to me. Perhaps his duties tend to make a man callous."

"But there is a wide gap between bad language and murder."

"I know, I know. Only it occurred to me—I may be unduly imaginative—that for a man in his position—alone in the building with this boy till a late hour, there are so many facilities for disposing of a body—the furnace and so forth—it is nothing more than a vague suspicion."

We were silent for some time, leaving our food untasted. Then my friend said, "Why don't you ask Jones to go back with you? He could look over the

place and tackle the porter in a way you could not. Let him represent himself as employed to find the missing boy."

"Will you?" said the doctor, turning to me. "It would take a great load off my mind, but I scarcely liked to suggest it."

We wasted no further time over luncheon. The doctor had his car waiting and drove me to the school. "If you don't mind," I said, "I should like you to introduce me to the custodian and leave him to show me round. I can put the necessary questions to him as we go. It will seem less formal and official." This being precisely what the doctor wanted, he took me straight to the laboratory, where a middle-aged man was moving about in his shirt sleeves. "Stokes," he said, "this is Mr. Meddlesome-Jones, who is enquiring into the disappearance of young Sopwith. He would like you to show him round the premises. I'll leave him with you." He shook hands with me and disappeared.

Stokes seemed quite glad to see me. "We had better not disturb the students in the operating-room, sir. They'll all be gone at five and in the meantime we can go over the basement. Queer business, this of young Sopwith. A better lad never stepped, but I had noticed lately that things had been going wrong with him. He had lost interest in his work."

"Had he anything on his mind?"

"That's just what I think. From things he let drop I think he was gone on some young woman who wouldn't have him. One day he said, 'What's the least that a young couple could live on in London, Mr. Stokes?' And when I named two pound a week, he just fell to pieces, as if I'd crushed him. He's never been the same lad since they refused him for the Army. This is where they bring them in, sir."

"Bring what in?"

"The subjects," he said, in some surprise. We were in a vaulted tunnel in the basement. "And this is the boiler house." A furnace was glowing behind a red hot door.

"Whose duty is it to stoke the boiler?"

"That's just it, sir. It was young Sopwith's duty, but latterly he neglected it and it fell upon me. The same with the packing."

"The packing?"

"Yes, packing the subjects into the coffin. Here is the packing room." We were in a vaulted cellar. On one side was a pile of rough deal coffins stained black, on the other trays of bones and skulls with dried flesh adhering to them. "They come down here from the operating-room like that, sir, and it was young Sopwith's duty to sort them out into some sort of body for each coffin; that is to say, he was supposed to be careful that, as far as he could, there should be only one head, two arms and two legs in each coffin before it was nailed up and taken to the cemetery, but he was very careless latterly and I've had to see to it myself."

"You mean he mixed up the bodies?"

"Oh, no one could help doing that, sir. You can't keep them distinct, but we keep a register of the names and each coffin has the name of one of the subjects

tacked on to it for funeral purposes. But of course it may not be their remains. Probably there is something belonging to ten or a dozen in each coffin."

While we were holding this cheerful conversation I was leaning on an enormous wooden box in the outer cellar. I ventured on a question.

"When they bring in the—the subjects, what is done with them?"

"If you will stand over there, sir, I'll show you. You are leaning on them." I must have startled him by the speed of my movements. "Oh, they won't bite, sir," he said, smiling, as he lifted the heavy lid. I peeped over his shoulder. There on racks lay ten human bodies, old and young, stiff, nude and white, the débris of humanity, the homeless, and friendless, who lead their lives in the London workhouses and probably are sorry to leave them in spite of the misery they have known. In their death they do more for humanity than they have ever done in life, by furnishing material for each fresh generation of surgeons to work upon. "We keep them fresh by injecting formalin," he said, pointing to a wound in the neck of one of the corpses. He shut down the lid and looked at his watch. "The students will be gone now, sir," he said. "I'll take you to the dissecting-room." He led the way upstairs to a large room with high windows that ran the length of the building. A dozen tables, each covered with a sheet, held the subjects that were in the hands of students. One attracted my attention on account of its great bulk in comparison wih the rest. The sheet scarcely sufficed to cover it. "Oh that. That's a young elephant that died in the Zoo. One of the students who is sure of his final had a fancy for it."

At the end of the room were a number of iron doors labelled "Head," "Arm," "Leg," "Pelvis," and so on. I asked Stokes what was in them, for they were a possible hiding-place for the body of the missing youth. He threw open one of the iron doors disclosing iron racks, on which human remains were disposed in various stages of dissection.

"It's these that make our job of 'assembling' so difficult downstairs. There's perhaps the arms of twenty people in there and there'll be twenty heads in the next cupboard but one. But it has to be like this so that a student can take up his work just where he left off."

Something had caught my attention and I was scarcely listening. These human arms with desiccated flesh adhering to the bones. Where had I seen them? Then it came upon me with a flash—the remains of the murdered woman in our office. I turned to Stokes.

"Do you ever lose any of these bodies?"

"Oh, now and again a student will take away a hand or a foot in his bag to work on at home, but if he did such a thing without reporting it to me there'd be trouble, sir. You see, they can't get past my system of booking in and out. I make 'em all sign for what they have. You, for instance, sir, suppose you were a new student. You come to me and you say, 'Stokes, have you got a knee for me to-day?' 'Yes,' I says, 'but you'll have to sign for a whole leg.' And then you slip it into your bag and walk away with it. Then, the next morning you says, 'Stokes, I think I'll work at the wrist and hand to-day. Have you got a nice forearm?' I look at my book and I say, 'Mr. Meddlesome-Jones, not another bit do

you get until I see that leg you had yesterday.'" He became silent and thoughtful. "Mind you, I don't say that I've never had them get by me. There was that Allen, for instance—I'll have something to say to *him* when he comes back, if he ever does."

"Tell me about Allen," I said, trying hard to keep my voice even and steady.

"Oh, you should ask the Principal about him. He'd have plenty to tell you. He got away with a whole body from me last year—more than a body—and I didn't find it out till I was going over my books afterwards. Cunning? I never knew a man to beat him. I'll tell you how he did it. On a Monday he'd ask for a head, and just before five I'd see him go to that locker with the head in his hand. Of course, I thought he'd put it back. On Tuesday I'd get a note from him to say he'd been called away. Would I keep the same head for him? He'd be away perhaps a week, and then he'd ask for an arm and so it went on. It wasn't for weeks that I found out what he'd been doing, and then it was too late: he'd gone abroad. He was always doing that—playing fast and loose with the institution. I can't understand why the Principal lets him come back time after time. Well, if he comes back after this he'll have some questions to answer. I've got them all booked up and I'd know them anywhere. Look here, sir, a page all to himself."

He turned over the leaves of his ledger and there, under the name of Henry Allen, were the entries, "June 20th. Head No. 128, male. July 2nd. Forearm No. 43, female," and so on.

"Would you know your—your specimens again if you saw them?"

"Know them? Yes, and could swear to every one of them. When Allen had a subject I put my private mark on it, so there should be no mistake. It's a theft, that's what it is, to say nothing of the trouble it meant for me if I couldn't make up the number of the funerals."

I asked him whether the Principal was still in the building. If so I must see him before he left. He looked at his watch.

"You'll just catch him if you are quick, sir. He leaves sharp at six. It's the second door on the left as you go down the passage."

I was just in time; the Doctor was brushing his hat. "Well," he said, "any daylight?"

"I think I have cleared up one thing: young Sopwith has not been murdered on the premises."

"And you think?"

"I think that you should report him to Scotland Yard as missing, giving his home address. It may be a case of suicide." (I was justified next morning when Sopwith's body was found in the Thames, with a letter in the pocket addressed to the object of his affections.) "But I came to ask you about another matter altogether. You had a student named Henry Allen!"

He threw down his hat and lifted his hands to Heaven. "Henry Allen! Has that fellow turned up again? I never met such a man in my life before. The most charitable view that one can take of Allen is to say that he was mad. Why, that man has been on our books for six years. He passed all his intermediate

tests brilliantly, and I used to think that he would carry all before him in his final. Then, on the very eve of the examination I would get a note from him saying that he was called abroad on business and we might see nothing of him for six months. I don't know whether it was stage fright or simply a love of roving; perhaps a little of both. He was a good deal older than the ordinary run of pupils, and was an interesting person if one got him to talk. But he made no friends here. He paid his fees regularly and worked hard. You should get Stokes to tell you about him. He accuses him of stealing some of his subjects."

"And I think he is right about that. But I can get them back for you if you think it worth while. I know where they are."

"Is there anything in London that you don't know? Of course, we'd like them back."

"Can Stokes come and identify them?"

"Of course he can. Arrange it with him—any time you like. And now I must be off—one of these horrible early public dinners. I cannot thank you enough for coming."

I found Stokes in the laboratory just sitting down to his tea. "Let me get you a cup, sir. A drop of tea helps one through the evening." He pushed back a plate containing a human eye to make room for my cup, and I found my appetite had left me. I declined the tea, but we talked while he ate and drank. It was a creepy sort of place, this laboratory: bottles from ceiling to floor all alike and all containing the intimate machinery of the human machine—the watch-springs of the human body—bleached and half-floating in yellowish liquid. They did not disturb Stokes' appetite in the least.

"You said just now that you could identify the—er—specimens that Allen took away."

"Try me, sir."

"That's exactly what I want to do if you'll come with me now."

"You know where they are!" he exclaimed in astonishment. "I'll go whenever you like."

It was past seven when we reached the office, but a light showing beneath the door proved that my Chief was still there. I asked Stokes to wait on the landing till I called him.

"I've been thinking over that Henry Allen case, Mr. Meddlesome-Jones," said my Chief before I could speak. "I've been waiting for you all the afternoon. I am now satisfied that in Allen we have got Jack the Ripper. That woman in there is one of his victims." I was so much taken aback that I forgot all about Stokes. "Yes," my Chief continued, "everything points to it—the man's personal habits—his secretiveness—his sudden disappearances. When you arrest him bear in mind that he has a knife about him."

"Don't say any more, Mr. Pepper, till you've heard what I've got to tell you. I have a man here who says he can identify the bones. They are surgical specimens which Allen stole from him." I have never seen a face so transfigured with noble indignation. After all, I was belittling one of the most important cases in his experience.

"Bring him in," he said faintly, and he lighted up the laboratory, into which I led Stokes. My Chief threw back the sheet while I watched Stokes. His was not usually an expressive face. First his eyes grew very round: then his whole frame was shaken with some strong emotion. He seemed quite unable to speak. When at last he found his voice it came harsh and loud. He picked up a thigh bone and said, "You are right, sir; they're ours right enough. Here's my private mark," and he showed me "128" scratched in minute figures on the bone. He looked hard at the face, and again his sturdy frame was shaken by a convulsive movement that began quite low down in his body and seemed to deprive him of speech. If his face had not been so impassive I should have said that his emotion was suppressed laughter. When at last he had recovered command of his voice he said, "You've made a fine woman of No. 48, but what about his beard? He had a long grey beard when he was with us." I did not dare to look at my Chief.

"I think," I said very gently, "that Mr. Stokes had better take the bones away with him. They belong to his medical school, where Henry Allen was a student. They were, in fact, stolen, and the authorities may wish to prosecute." My Chief made no sign, and Stokes began to pack up the specimens in the trunk.

"When Mr. Henry Allen comes home," he said, "and asks for his trunk, you might refer him to the Principal, if you don't mind." He took one long look at the head before he wrapped it up. "I wouldn't damage this wax-work for the world: we'll put it in our Museum." As I was helping him down the stairs with the trunk, he said, "Your friend must have been puzzled by the different sizes of the bones. One arm and one leg belonged to women."

"He was a little puzzled. He thought that the murdered woman was deformed."

"I suppose he didn't happen to notice that she had three hands. I see that he had put one of them where a foot was missing."

When I reached Mrs. Auger's door a man was ringing the bell. He was a thin, hunted-looking creature of about thirty, with three days' growth of beard. The door opened as I came up and Mrs. Auger said, "Oh, Mr. Allen, where *have* you been?"

"I've been in Lisbon," he said in a weak voice.

I laid my hand firmly on his shoulder and said, "Henry Allen, you are wanted at the Medical School to explain why you are unlawfully in possession of certain anatomical specimens which are their property and I must caution you that anything you say will be taken down in writing and used against you at your trial." He turned very white and Mrs. Auger collapsed on her own doorstep.

But the Principal declined to prosecute.

Aldous Huxley

THE GIOCONDA SMILE

from MORTAL COILS

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1

Miss Spence will be down directly, sir."

"Thank you," said Mr. Hutton, without turning round. Janet Spence's parlour-maid was so ugly—ugly on purpose, it always seemed to him, malignantly, criminally ugly—that he could not bear to look at her more than was necessary. The door closed. Left to himself, Mr. Hutton got up and began to wander round the room, looking with meditative eyes at the familiar objects it contained.

Photographs of Greek statuary, photographs of the Roman Forum, coloured prints of Italian masterpieces, all very safe and well known. Poor, dear Janet, what a prig—what an intellectual snob! Her real taste was illustrated in that water-colour by the pavement artist, the one she had paid half a crown for (and thirty-five shillings for the frame). How often he had heard her tell the story, how often expatiated on the beauties of that skilful imitation of an oleograph! "A real Artist in the streets," and you could hear the capital A in Artist as she spoke the words. She made you feel that part of his glory had entered into Janet Spence when she tendered him that half-crown for the copy of the oleograph. She was implying a compliment to her own taste and penetration. A genuine Old Master for half a crown. Poor, dear Janet!

Mr. Hutton came to a pause in front of a small oblong mirror. Stooping a little to get a full view of his face, he passed a white, well-manicured finger over his moustache. It was as curly, as freshly auburn as it had been twenty years ago. His hair still retained its colour, and there was no sign of baldness yet—only a certain elevation of the brow. "Shakespearean," thought Mr. Hutton, with a smile, as he surveyed the smooth and polished expanse of his forehead.

Others abide our question, thou art free. . . . Footsteps in the sea . . . Majesty. . . . Shakespeare, thou shouldst be living at this hour. No, that was Milton, wasn't it? Milton, the Lady of Christ's. There was no lady about him. He was what the women would call a manly man. That was why they liked him—for the curly auburn moustache and the discreet redolence of tobacco. Mr. Hutton smiled again; he enjoyed making fun of himself. Himself Christ's? No, no. He was the Christ of Ladies. Very pretty, very pretty. The Christ of Ladies.

Mr. Hutton wished there were somebody he could tell the joke to. Poor, dear Janet wouldn't appreciate it, alas!

He straightened himself up, parted his hair, and resumed his peregrination. Damn the Roman Forum; he hated those dreary photographs.

Suddenly he became aware that Janet Spence was in the room, standing near the door. Mr. Hutton started, as though he had been taken in some felonious act. To make these silent and spectral appearances was one of Janet Spence's peculiar talents. Perhaps she had been there all the time, and seen him looking at himself in the mirror. Impossible! But, still, it was disquieting.

"Oh, you gave me such a surprise," said Mr. Hutton, recovering his smile and advancing with outstretched hand to meet her.

Miss Spence was smiling too: her Gioconda smile, he had once called it in a moment of half-ironical flattery. Miss Spence had taken the compliment seriously, and always tried to live up to the Leonardo standard. She smiled on in silence while Mr. Hutton shook hands; that was part of the Gioconda business.

"I hope you're well," said Mr. Hutton. "You look it."

What a queer face she had! That small mouth pursed forward by the Gioconda expression into a little snout with a round hole in the middle as though for whistling—it was like a penholder seen from the front. Above the mouth a well-shaped nose, finely aquiline. Eyes large, lustrous, and dark, with the largeness, lustre, and darkness that seems to invite sties and an occasional bloodshot suffusion. They were fine eyes, but unchangingly grave. The penholder might do its Gioconda trick, but the eyes never altered in their earnestness. Above them, a pair of boldly arched, heavily pencilled black eyebrows lent a surprising air of power, as of a Roman matron, to the upper portion of the face. Her hair was dark and equally Roman; Agrippina from the brows upwards.

"I thought I'd just look in on my way home," Mr. Hutton went on. "Ah, it's good to be back here"—he indicated with a wave of his hand the flowers in the vases, the sunshine and greenery beyond the windows—"it's good to be back in the country after a stuffy day of business in town."

Miss Spence, who had sat down, pointed to a chair at her side.

"No, really, I can't sit down," Mr. Hutton protested. "I must get back to see how poor Emily is. She was rather seedy this morning." He sat down, nevertheless. "It's these wretched liver chills. She's always getting them. Women——" He broke off and coughed, so as to hide the fact that he had uttered. He was about to say that women with weak digestions ought not to marry; but the remark was too cruel, and he didn't really believe it. Janet Spence, moreover, was a believer in eternal flames and spiritual attachments. "She hopes to be well enough," he added, "to see you at luncheon to-morrow. Can you come? Do?" He smiled persuasively. "It's my invitation too, you know."

She dropped her eyes, and Mr. Hutton almost thought that he detected a certain redd[illegible] of the cheek. It was a tribute; he stroked his moustache.

"I should [illegible] come if you think Emily's really well enough to have a visitor."

"Of course. You'll do her good. You'll do us both good. In married life three is often better company than two."

"Oh, you're cynical."

Mr. Hutton always had a desire to say "Bow-wow-wow" whenever that last word was spoken. It irritated him more than any other word in the language. But instead of barking he made haste to protest.

"No, no. I'm only speaking a melancholy truth. Reality doesn't always come up to the ideal, you know. But that doesn't make me believe any the less in the ideal. Indeed, I believe in it passionately—the ideal of a matrimony between two people in perfect accord. I think it's realisable. I'm sure it is."

He paused significantly and looked at her with an arch expression. A virgin of thirty-six, but still unwithered; she had her charms. And there was something really rather enigmatic about her. Miss Spence made no reply, but continued to smile. There were times when Mr. Hutton got rather bored with the Gioconda. He stood up.

"I must really be going now. Farewell, mysterious Gioconda." The smile grew intenser, focused itself, as it were, in a narrower snout. Mr. Hutton made a Cinquecento gesture, and kissed her extended hand. It was the first time he had done such a thing; the action seemed not to be resented. "I look forward to to-morrow."

"Do you?"

For answer Mr. Hutton once more kissed her hand, then turned to go. Miss Spence accompanied him to the porch.

"Where's your car?" she asked.

"I left it at the gate of the drive."

"I'll come and see you off."

"No, no." Mr. Hutton was playful, but determined. "You must do no such thing. I simply forbid you."

"But I should like to come," Miss Spence protested, throwing a rapid Gioconda at him.

Mr. Hutton held up his hand. "No," he repeated, and then, with a gesture that was almost the blowing of a kiss, he started to run down the drive, lightly, on his toes, with long, bounding strides like a boy's. He was proud of that run; it was quite marvellously youthful. Still, he was glad the drive was no longer. At the last bend, before passing out of sight of the house, he halted and turned round. Miss Spence was still standing on the steps, smiling her smile. He waved his hand, and this time quite definitely and overtly wafted a kiss in her direction. Then, breaking once more into his magnificent canter, he rounded the last dark promontory of trees. Once out of sight of the house he let his high paces decline to a trot, and finally to a walk. He took out his handkerchief and began wiping his neck inside his collar. What fools, what fools! Had there ever been such an ass as poor, dear Janet Spence? Never, unless it was himself. Decidedly he was the more malignant fool, since he, at least, was aware of his folly and still persisted in it. Why did he persist? Ah, the problem that was himself, the problem that was other people . . .

He had reached the gate. A large, prosperous-looking motor was standing at the side of the road.

"Home, M'Nab." The chauffeur touched his cap. "And stop at the cross-roads on the way, as usual," Mr. Hutton added, as he opened the door of the car. "Well?" he said, speaking into the obscurity that lurked within.

"Oh, Teddy Bear, what an age you've been!" It was a fresh and childish voice that spoke the words. There was the faintest hint of Cockney impurity about the vowel sounds.

Mr. Hutton bent his large form and darted into the car with the agility of an animal regaining his burrow.

"Have I?" he said, as he shut the door. The machine began to move. "You must have missed me a lot if you found the time so long." He sat back in the low seat; a cherishing warmth enveloped him.

"Teddy Bear . . ." and with a sigh of contentment a charming little head declined on to Mr. Hutton's shoulder. Ravished, he looked down sideways at the round, babyish face.

"Do you know, Doris, you look like the pictures of Louise de Kerouaille." He passed his fingers through a mass of curly hair.

"Who's Louise de Kera-whatever-it-is?" Doris spoke from remote distances.

"She was, alas! *Fuit*. We shall all be 'was' one of these days. Meanwhile . . ."

Mr. Hutton covered the babyish face with kisses. The car rushed smoothly along. M'Nab's back through the front window, was stonily impassive, the back of a statue.

"Your hands," Doris whispered. "Oh, you mustn't touch me. They give me electric shocks."

Mr. Hutton adored her for the virgin imbecility of the words. How late in one's existence one makes the discovery of one's body!

"The electricity isn't in me, it's in you." He kissed her again, whispering her name several times: Doris, Doris, Doris. The scientific appellation of the sea-mouse, he was thinking as he kissed the throat she offered him, white and extended like the throat of a victim awaiting the sacrificial knife. The sea-mouse was a sausage with iridescent fur: very peculiar. Or was Doris the sea-cucumber, which turns itself inside out in moments of alarm? He would really have to go to Naples again, just to see the aquarium. These sea creatures were fabulous, unbelievably fantastic.

"Oh, Teddy Bear!" (More zoology; but he was only a land animal. His poor little jokes!) "Teddy Bear, I'm so happy."

"So am I," said Mr. Hutton. Was it true?

"But I wish I knew if it were right. Tell me, Teddy Bear, is it right or wrong?"

"Ah, my dear, that's just what I've been wondering for the last thirty years."

"Be serious, Teddy Bear. I want to know if this is right; if it's right that I should be here with you and that we should love one another, and that it should give me electric shocks when you touch me."

"Right? Well, it's certainly good that you should have electric shocks rather than sexual repressions. Read Freud; repressions are the devil."

"Oh, you don't help me. Why aren't you ever serious? If only you knew how miserable I am sometimes, thinking it's not right. Perhaps, you know, there is a hell, and all that. I don't know what to do. Sometimes I think I ought to stop loving you."

"But could you?" asked Mr. Hutton, confident in the powers of his seduction and his moustache.

"No, Teddy Bear, you know I couldn't. But I could run away, I could hide from you, I could lock myself up and force myself not to come to you."

"Silly little thing!" He tightened his embrace.

"Oh, dear. I hope it isn't wrong. And there are times when I don't care if it is."

Mr. Hutton was touched. He had a certain protective affection for this little creature. He laid his cheek against her hair and so, interlaced, they sat in silence, while the car, swaying and pitching a little as it hastened along, seemed to draw in the white road and the dusty hedges towards it devouringly.

"Good-bye, good-bye."

The car moved on, gathered speed, vanished round a curve, and Doris was left standing by the sign-post at the cross-roads, still dizzy and weak with the langour born of those kisses and the electrical touch of those gentle hands. She had to take a deep breath, to draw herself up deliberately, before she was strong enough to start her homeward walk. She had half a mile in which to invent the necessary lies.

Alone, Mr. Hutton suddenly found himself the prey of an appalling boredom.

2

Mrs. Hutton was lying on the sofa in her boudoir, playing Patience. In spite of the warmth of the July evening a wood fire was burning on the hearth. A black Pomeranian, extenuated by the heat and the fatigues of digestion, slept before the blaze.

"Phew! Isn't it rather hot in here?" Mr. Hutton asked as he entered the room.

"You know I have to keep warm, dear." The voice seemed breaking on the verge of tears. "I get so shivery."

"I hope you're better this evening."

"Not much, I'm afraid."

The conversation stagnated. Mr. Hutton stood leaning his back against the mantelpiece. He looked down at the Pomeranian lying at his feet, and with the toe of his right boot he rolled the little dog over and rubbed its white-flecked chest and belly. The creature lay in an inert ecstasy. Mrs. Hutton continued to play Patience. Arrived at an *impasse*, she altered the position of one card, took back another, and went on playing. Her Patiences always came out.

"Dr. Libbard thinks I ought to go to Llandrindod Wells this summer."

"Well, go, my dear—go, most certainly."

Mr. Hutton was thinking of the events of the afternoon: how they had driven, Doris and he, up to the hanging wood, had left the car to wait for them under

the shade of the trees, and walked together out into the windless sunshine of the chalk down.

"I'm to drink the waters for my liver, and he thinks I ought to have massage and electric treatment, too."

Hat in hand, Doris had stalked four blue butterflies that were dancing together round a scabious flower with a motion that was like the flickering of blue fire. The blue fire burst and scattered into whirling sparks; she had given chase, laughing and shouting like a child.

"I'm sure it will do you good, my dear."

"I was wondering if you'd come with me, dear."

"But you know I'm going to Scotland at the end of the month."

Mrs. Hutton looked up at him entreatingly. "It's the journey," she said. "The thought of it is such a nightmare. I don't know if I can manage it. And you know I can't sleep in hotels. And then there's the luggage and all the worries. I can't go alone."

"But you won't be alone. You'll have your maid with you." He spoke impatiently. The sick woman was usurping the place of the healthy one. He was being dragged back from the memory of the sunlit down and the quick, laughing girl, back to this unhealthy, overheated room and its complaining occupant.

"I don't think I shall be able to go."

"But you must, my dear, if the doctor tells you to. And, besides, a change will do you good."

"I don't think so."

"But Libbard thinks so, and he knows what he's talking about."

"No, I can't face it. I'm too weak. I can't go alone." Mrs. Hutton pulled a handkerchief out of her black silk bag, and put it to her eyes.

"Nonsense, my dear, you must make the effort."

"I had rather be left in peace to die here." She was crying in earnest now.

"O Lord! Now do be reasonable. Listen now, please." Mrs. Hutton only sobbed more violently. "Oh, what is one to do?" He shrugged his shoulders and walked out of the room.

Mr. Hutton was aware that he had not behaved with proper patience; but he could not help it. Very early in his manhood he had discovered that not only did he not feel sympathy for the poor, the weak, the diseased, and deformed; he actually hated them. Once, as an undergraduate, he spent three days at a mission in the East End. He had returned, filled with a profound and ineradicable disgust. Instead of pitying, he loathed the unfortunate. It was not, he knew, a very comely emotion, and he had been ashamed of it at first. In the end he had decided that it was temperamental, inevitable, and had felt no further qualms. Emily had been healthy and beautiful when he married her. He had loved her then. But now—was it his fault that she was like this?

Mr. Hutton dined alone. Food and drink left him more benevolent than he had been before dinner. To make amends for his show of exasperation he went up to his wife's room and offered to read to her. She was touched, gratefully

accepted the offer, and Mr. Hutton, who was particularly proud of his accent, suggested a little light reading in French.

"French? I am so fond of French." Mrs. Hutton spoke of the language of Racine as though it were a dish of green peas.

Mr. Hutton ran down to the library and returned with a yellow volume. He began reading. The effort of pronouncing perfectly absorbed his whole attention. But how good his accent was! The fact of its goodness seemed to improve the quality of the novel he was reading.

At the end of fifteen pages an unmistakable sound aroused him. He looked up; Mrs. Hutton had gone to sleep. He sat still for a little while, looking with a dispassionate curiosity at the sleeping face. Once it had been beautiful; once, long ago, the sight of it, the recollection of it, had moved him with an emotion profounder, perhaps, than any he had felt before or since. Now it was lined and cadaverous. The skin was stretched tightly over the cheek-bones, across the bridge of the sharp, bird-like nose. The closed eyes were set in profound bone-rimmed sockets. The lamplight striking on the face from the side emphasised with light and shade its cavities and projections. It was the face of a dead Christ by Morales.

Le squelette était invisible
Au temps heureux de l'art païen.

He shivered a little, and tiptoed out of the room.

On the following day Mrs. Hutton came down to luncheon. She had had some unpleasant palpitations during the night, but she was feeling better now. Besides, she wanted to do honour to her guest. Miss Spence listened to her complaints about Llandrindod Wells, and was loud in sympathy, lavish with advice. Whatever she said was always said with intensity. She leaned forward, aimed, so to speak, like a gun, and fired her words. Bang! the charge in her soul was ignited, the words whizzed forth at the narrow barrel of her mouth. She was a machine-gun riddling her hostess with sympathy. Mr. Hutton had undergone similar bombardments, mostly of a literary or philosophic character —bombardments of Maeterlinck, of Mrs. Besant, of Bergson, of William James. To-day the missiles were medical. She talked about insomnia, she expatiated on the virtues of harmless drugs and beneficent specialists. Under the bombardment Mrs. Hutton opened out, like a flower in the sun.

Mr. Hutton looked on in silence. The spectacle of Janet Spence evoked in him an unfailing curiosity. He was not romantic enough to imagine that every face masked an interior physiognomy of beauty or strangeness, that every woman's small talk was like a vapour hanging over mysterious gulfs. His wife, for example, and Doris; they were nothing more than what they seemed to be. But with Janet Spence it was somehow different. Here one could be sure that there was some kind of a queer face behind the Gioconda smile and the Roman eyebrows. The only question was: What exactly was there? Mr. Hutton could never quite make out.

"But perhaps you won't have to go to Llandrindod after all," Miss Spence was saying. "If you get well quickly Dr. Libbard will let you off."

"I only hope so. Indeed, I do really feel rather better to-day."

Mr. Hutton felt ashamed. How much was it his own lack of sympathy that prevented her from feeling well every day? But he comforted himself by reflecting that it was only a case of feeling, not of being better. Sympathy does not mend a diseased liver or a weak heart.

"My dear, I wouldn't eat those red currants if I were you," he said, suddenly solicitous. "You know that Libbard has banned everything with skins and pips."

"But I am so fond of them," Mrs. Hutton protested, "and I feel so well to-day."

"Don't be a tyrant," said Miss Spence, looking first at him and then at his wife. "Let the poor invalid have what she fancies; it will do her good." She laid her hand on Mrs. Hutton's arm and patted it affectionately two or three times.

"Thank you, my dear." Mrs. Hutton helped herself to the stewed currants.

"Well, don't blame me if they make you ill again."

"Do I ever blame you, dear?"

"You have nothing to blame me for," Mr. Hutton answered playfully. "I am the perfect husband."

They sat in the garden after luncheon. From the island of shade under the old cypress tree they looked out across a flat expanse of lawn, in which the parterres of flowers shone with a metallic brilliance.

Mr. Hutton took a deep breath of the warm and fragrant air. "It's good to be alive," he said.

"Just to be alive," his wife echoed, stretching one pale, knot-jointed hand into the sunlight.

A maid brought the coffee; the silver pots and the little blue cups were set on a folding table near the group of chairs.

"Oh, my medicine!" exclaimed Mrs. Hutton. "Run in and fetch it, Clara, will you? The white bottle on the sideboard."

"I'll go," said Mr. Hutton. "I've got to go and fetch a cigar in any case."

He ran in towards the house. On the threshold he turned round for an instant. The maid was walking back across the lawn. His wife was sitting up in her deck-chair, engaged in opening her white parasol. Miss Spence was bending over the table, pouring out the coffee. He passed into the cool obscurity of the house.

"Do you like sugar in your coffee?" Miss Spence inquired.

"Yes, please. Give me rather a lot. I'll drink it after my medicine to take the taste away."

Mrs. Hutton leaned back in her chair, lowering the sunshade over her eyes, so as to shut out from her vision the burning sky.

Behind her, Miss Spence was making a delicate clinking among the coffee-cups.

"I've given you three large spoonfuls. That ought to take the taste away. And here comes the medicine."

Mr. Hutton had reappeared, carrying a wine-glass, half full of a pale liquid.

"It smells delicious," he said, as he handed it to his wife.

"That's only the flavouring." She drank it off at a gulp, shuddered, and made a grimace. "Ugh, it's so nasty. Give me my coffee."

Miss Spence gave her the cup; she sipped at it. "You've made it like syrup. But it's very nice, after that atrocious medicine."

At half-past three Mrs. Hutton complained that she did not feel as well as she had done, and went indoors to lie down. Her husband would have said something about the red currants, but checked himself; the triumph of an "I told you so" was too cheaply won. Instead, he was sympathetic, and gave her his arm to the house.

"A rest will do you good," he said. "By the way, I shan't be back till after dinner."

"But why? Where are you going?"

"I promised to go to Johnson's this evening. We have to discuss the war memorial, you know."

"Oh, I wish you weren't going." Mrs. Hutton was almost in tears. "Can't you stay? I don't like being alone in the house."

"But, my dear, I promised—weeks ago." It was a bother having to lie like this. "And now I must get back and look after Miss Spence."

He kissed her on the forehead and went out again into the garden. Miss Spence received him aimed and intense.

"Your wife is dreadfully ill," she fired off at him.

"I thought she cheered up so much when you came."

"That was purely nervous, purely nervous. I was watching her closely. With a heart in that condition and her digestion wrecked—yes, wrecked—anything might happen."

"Libbard doesn't take so gloomy a view of poor Emily's health." Mr. Hutton held open the gate that led from the garden into the drive; Miss Spence's car was standing by the front door.

"Libbard is only a country doctor. You ought to see a specialist."

He could not refrain from laughing. "You have a macabre passion for specialists."

Miss Spence held up her hand in protest. "I am serious. I think poor Emily is in a very bad state. Anything might happen—at any moment."

He handed her into the car and shut the door. The chauffeur started the engine and climbed into his place, ready to drive off.

"Shall I tell him to start?" He had no desire to continue the conversation.

Miss Spence leaned forward and shot a Gioconda in his direction. "Remember, I expect you to come and see me again soon."

Mechanically he grinned, made a polite noise, and, as the car moved forward, waved his hand. He was happy to be alone.

A few minutes afterwards Mr. Hutton himself drove away. Doris was waiting at the cross-roads. They dined together twenty miles from home, at a roadside hotel. It was one of those bad, expensive meals which are only cooked in country hotels frequented by motorists. It revolted Mr. Hutton, but Doris enjoyed it.

She always enjoyed things. Mr. Hutton ordered a not very good brand of champagne. He was wishing he had spent the evening in his library.

When they started homewards Doris was a little tipsy and extremely affectionate. It was very dark inside the car, but looking forward, past the motionless form of M'Nab, they could see a bright and narrow universe of forms and colours scooped out of the night by the electric head-lamps.

It was after eleven when Mr. Hutton reached home. Dr. Libbard met him in the hall. He was a small man with delicate hands and well-formed features that were almost feminine. His brown eyes were large and melancholy. He used to waste a great deal of time sitting at the bedside of his patients, looking sadness through those eyes and talking in a sad, low voice about nothing in particular. His person exhaled a pleasing odour, decidedly antiseptic but at the same time suave and discreetly delicious.

"Libbard?" said Mr. Hutton in surprise. "You here? Is my wife ill?"

"We tried to fetch you earlier," the soft, melancholy voice replied. "It was thought you were at Mr. Johnson's, but they had no news of you there."

"No, I was detained. I had a breakdown," Mr. Hutton answered irritably. It was tiresome to be caught out in a lie.

"Your wife wanted to see you urgently."

"Well, I can go now." Mr. Hutton moved towards the stairs.

Dr. Libbard laid a hand on his arm. "I am afraid it's too late."

"Too late?" He began fumbling with his watch; it wouldn't come out of the pocket.

"Mrs. Hutton passed away half an hour ago."

The voice remained even in its softness, the melancholy of the eyes did not deepen. Dr. Libbard spoke of death as he would speak of a local cricket match. All things were equally vain and equally deplorable.

Mr. Hutton found himself thinking of Janet Spence's words. At any moment —at any moment. She had been extraordinarily right.

"What happened?" he asked. "What was the cause?"

Dr. Libbard explained. It was heart failure brought on by a violent attack of nausea, caused in its turn by the eating of something of an irritant nature. Red currants? Mr. Hutton suggested. Very likely. It had been too much for the heart. There was chronic valvular disease: something had collapsed under the strain. It was all over; she could not have suffered much.

3

"It's a pity they should have chosen the day of the Eton and Harrow match for the funeral," old General Grego was saying as he stood, his top hat in his hand, under the shadow of the lych gate, wiping his face with his handkerchief.

Mr. Hutton overheard the remark and with difficulty restrained a desire to inflict grievous bodily pain on the General. He would have liked to hit the old brute in the middle of his big red face. Monstrous great mulberry, spotted with meal! Was there no respect for the dead? Did nobody care? In theory he didn't

much care; let the dead bury their dead. But here, at the graveside, he had found himself actually sobbing. Poor Emily, they had been pretty happy once. Now she way lying at the bottom of a seven-foot hole. And here was Grego complaining that he couldn't go to the Eton and Harrow match.

Mr. Hutton looked round at the groups of black figures that were drifting slowly out of the churchyard towards the fleet of cabs and motors assembled in the road outside. Against the brilliant background of the July grass and flowers and foliage, they had a horribly alien and unnatural appearance. It pleased him to think that all these people would soon be dead too.

That evening Mr. Hutton sat up late in his library reading the life of Milton. There was no particular reason why he should have chosen Milton; it was the book that first came to hand, that was all. It was after midnight when he had finished. He got up from his armchair, unbolted the French windows, and stepped out on to the little paved terrace. The night was quiet and clear. Mr. Hutton looked at the stars and at the holes between them, dropped his eyes to the dim lawns and hueless flowers of the garden, and let them wander over the farther landscape, black and grey under the moon.

He began to think with a kind of confused violence. There were the stars, there was Milton. A man can be somehow the peer of stars and night. Greatness, nobility. But is there seriously a difference between the noble and the ignoble? Milton, the stars, death, and himself—himself. The soul, the body; the higher and the lower nature. Perhaps there was something in it, after all. Milton had a god on his side and righteousness. What had he? Nothing, nothing whatever. There were only Doris's little breasts. What was the point of it all? Milton, the stars, death, and Emily in her grave, Doris and himself—always himself . . .

Oh, he was a futile and disgusting being. Everything convinced him of it. It was a solemn moment. He spoke aloud: "I will, I will." The sound of his own voice in the darkness was appalling; it seemed to him that he had sworn that infernal oath which binds even the gods: "I will, I will." There had been New Year's days and solemn anniversaries in the past, when he had felt the same contritions and recorded similar resolutions. They had all thinned away, these resolutions, like smoke, into nothingness. But this was a greater moment and he had pronounced a more fearful oath. In the future it was to be different. Yes, he would live by reason, he would be industrious, he would curb his appetites, he would devote his life to some good purpose. It was resolved and it would be so.

In practice he saw himself spending his mornings in agricultural pursuits, riding round with the bailiff, seeing that his land was farmed in the best modern way—silos and artificial manures and continuous cropping, and all that. The remainder of the day should be devoted to serious study. There was that book he had been intending to write for so long—*The Effect of Diseases on Civilisation*.

Mr. Hutton went to bed humble and contrite, but with a sense that grace had entered into him. He slept for seven and a half hours, and woke to find the sun brilliantly shining. The emotions of the evening before had been transformed by a good night's rest into his customary cheerfulness. It was not until a good

many seconds after his return to conscious life that he remembered his resolution, his Stygian oath. Milton and death seemed somehow different in the sunlight. As for the stars, they were not there. But the resolutions were good; even in the daytime he could see that. He had his horse saddled after breakfast, and rode around the farm with the bailiff. After luncheon he read Thucydides on the plague at Athens. In the evening he made a few notes on malaria in Southern Italy. While he was undressing he remembered that there was a good anecdote in Skelton's jest-book about the Sweating Sickness. He would have made a note of it if only he could have found a pencil.

On the sixth morning of his new life Mr. Hutton found among his correspondence an envelope addressed in that peculiarly vulgar handwriting which he knew to be Doris's. He opened it, and began to read. She didn't know what to say, words were so inadequate. His wife dying like that, and so suddenly—it was too terrible. Mr. Hutton sighed, but his interest revived somewhat as he read on:

> "Death is so frightening, I never think of it when I can help it. But when something like this happens, or when I am feeling ill or depressed, then I can't help remembering it is there so close, and I think about all the wicked things I have done and about you and me, and I wonder what will happen, and I am so frightened. I am so lonely, Teddy Bear, and so unhappy, and I don't know what to do. I can't get rid of the idea of dying, I am so wretched and helpless without you. I didn't mean to write to you; I meant to wait till you were out of mourning and could come and see me again, but I was so lonely and miserable, Teddy Bear, I had to write. I couldn't help it. Forgive me, I want you so much; I have nobody in the world but you. You are so good and gentle and understanding; there is nobody like you. I shall never forget how good and kind you have been to me, and you are so clever and know so much, I can't understand how you ever came to pay any attention to me, I am so dull and stupid, much less like me and love me, because you do love me a little, don't you, Teddy Bear?"

Mr. Hutton was touched with shame and remorse. To be thanked like this, worshipped for having seduced the girl—it was too much. It had just been a piece of imbecile wantonness. Imbecile, idiotic: there was no other way to describe it. For, when all was said, he had derived very little pleasure from it. Taking all things together, he had probably been more bored than amused. Once upon a time he had believed himself to be a hedonist. But to be a hedonist implies a certain process of reasoning, a deliberate choice of known pleasures, a rejection of known pains. This had been done without reason, against it. For he knew beforehand—so well, so well—that there was no interest or pleasure to be derived from these wretched affairs. And yet each time the vague itch came upon him he succumbed, involving himself once more in the old stupidity. There had been Maggie, his wife's maid, and Edith, the girl on the farm, and Mrs. Pringle, and the waitress in London, and others—there seemed to be dozens of them. It had all been so stale and boring. He knew it would be; he always knew. And yet, and yet . . . Experience doesn't teach.

Poor little Doris! He would write to her kindly, comfortingly, but he wouldn't see her again. A servant came to tell him that his horse was saddled and waiting. He mounted and rode off. That morning the old bailiff was more irritating than usual.

Five days later Doris and Mr. Hutton were sitting together on the pier at Southend; Doris, in white muslin with pink garnishings, radiated happiness; Mr. Hutton, legs outstretched and chair tilted, had pushed the panama back from his forehead, and was trying to feel like a tripper. That night, when Doris was asleep, breathing and warm by his side, he recaptured, in this moment of darkness and physical fatigue, the rather cosmic emotion which had possessed him that evening, not a fortnight ago, when he had made his great resolution. And so his solemn oath had already gone the way of so many other resolutions. Unreason had triumphed; at the first itch of desire he had given way. He was hopeless, hopeless.

For a long time he lay with closed eyes, ruminating his humiliation. The girl stirred in her sleep. Mr. Hutton turned over and looked in her direction. Enough faint light crept in between the half-drawn curtains to show her bare arm and shoulder, her neck, and the dark tangle of hair on the pillow. She was beautiful, desirable. Why did he lie there moaning over his sins? What did it matter? If he were hopeless, then so be it; he would make the best of his hopelessness. A glorious sense of irresponsibility suddenly filled him. He was free, magnificently free. In a kind of exaltation he drew the girl towards him. She woke, bewildered, almost frightened under his rough kisses.

The storm of his desire subsided into a kind of serene merriment. The whole atmosphere seemed to be quivering with enormous silent laughter.

"Could anyone love you as much as I do, Teddy Bear?" The question came faintly from distant worlds of love.

"I think I know somebody who does," Mr. Hutton replied. The submarine laughter was swelling, rising, ready to break the surface of silence and resound.

"Who? Tell me. What do you mean?" The voice had come very close; charged with suspicion, anguish, indignation, it belonged to this immediate world.

"A–ah!"

"Who?"

"You'll never guess." Mr. Hutton kept up the joke until it began to grow tedious, and then pronounced the name: "Janet Spence."

Doris was incredulous. "Miss Spence of the Manor? That old woman?" It was too ridiculous. Mr. Hutton laughed too.

"But it's quite true," he said. "She adores me." Oh, the vast joke! He would go and see her as soon as he returned–see and conquer. "I believe she wants to marry me," he added.

"But you wouldn't . . . you don't intend . . ."

The air was fairly crepitating with humour. Mr. Hutton laughed aloud. "I intend to marry you," he said. It seemed to him the best joke he had ever made in his life.

When Mr. Hutton left Southend he was once more a married man. It was

agreed that, for the time being, the fact should be kept secret. In the autumn they would go abroad together, and the world should be informed. Meanwhile he was to go back to his own house and Doris to hers.

The day after his return he walked over in the afternoon to see Miss Spence. She received him with the old Gioconda.

"I was expecting you to come."

"I couldn't keep away," Mr. Hutton gallantly replied.

They sat in the summer-house. It was a pleasant place—a little old stucco temple bowered among dense bushes of evergreen. Miss Spence had left her mark on it by hanging up over the seat a blue-and-white Della Robbia plaque.

"I am thinking of going to Italy this autumn," said Mr. Hutton. He felt like a ginger-beer bottle, ready to pop with bubbling humourous excitement.

"Italy. . . ." Miss Spence closed her eyes ecstatically. "I feel drawn there too."

"Why not let yourself be drawn?"

"I don't know. One somehow hasn't the energy and initiative to set out alone."

"Alone. . . ." Ah, sound of guitars and throaty singing! "Yes, travelling alone isn't much fun."

Miss Spence lay back in her chair without speaking. Her eyes were still closed. Mr. Hutton stroked his moustache. The silence prolonged itself for what seemed a very long time.

Pressed to stay to dinner, Mr. Hutton did not refuse. The fun had hardly started. The table was laid in the loggia. Through its arches they looked out on to the sloping garden, to the valley below and the farther hills. Light ebbed away; the heat and silence were oppressive. A huge cloud was mounting up the sky, and there were distant breathings of thunder. The thunder drew nearer, a wind began to blow, and the first drops of rain fell. The table was cleared. Miss Spence and Mr. Hutton sat on in the growing darkness.

Miss Spence broke a long silence by saying meditatively:

"I think everyone has a right to a certain amount of happiness, don't you?"

"Most certainly." But what was she leading up to? Nobody makes generalisations about life unless they mean to talk about themselves. Happiness: he looked back on his own life, and saw a cheerful, placid existence disturbed by no great griefs or discomforts or alarms. He had always had money and freedom; he had been able to do very much as he wanted. Yes, he supposed he had been happy—happier than most men. And now he was not merely happy; he had discovered in irresponsibility the secret of gaiety. He was about to say something about his happiness when Miss Spence went on speaking.

"People like you and me have a right to be happy some time in our lives."

"Me?" said Mr. Hutton, surprised.

"Poor Henry! Fate hasn't treated either of us very well."

"Oh, well, it might have treated me worse."

"You're being cheerful. That's brave of you. But don't think I can't see behind the mask."

Miss Spence spoke louder and louder as the rain came down more and more heavily. Periodically the thunder cut across her utterances. She talked on, shouting against the noise.

"I have understood you so well and for so long."

A flash revealed her, aimed and intent, leaning towards him. Her eyes were two profound and menacing gun-barrels. The darkness re-engulfed her.

"You were a lonely soul seeking a companion soul. I could sympathise with you in your solitude. Your marriage . . ."

The thunder cut short the sentence. Miss Spence's voice became audible once more with the words:

". . . could offer no companionship to a man of your stamp. You needed a soul mate."

A soul mate—he! a soul mate. It was incredibly fantastic. "Georgette Leblanc, the ex-soul mate of Maurice Maeterlinck." He had seen that in the paper a few days ago. So it was thus that Janet Spence had painted him in her imagination—as a soul-mater. And for Doris he was a picture of goodness and the cleverest man in the world. And actually, really, he was what?—Who knows?

"My heart went out to you. I could understand; I was lonely, too." Miss Spence laid her hand on his knee. "You were so patient." Another flash. She was still aimed, dangerously. "You never complained. But I could guess—I could guess."

"How wonderful of you!" So he was an *âme incomprise*. "Only a woman's intuition . . ."

The thunder crashed and rumbled, died away, and only the sound of the rain was left. The thunder was his laughter, magnified, externalised. Flash and crash, there it was again, right on top of them.

"Don't you feel that you have within you something that is akin to this storm?" He could imagine her leaning forward as she uttered the words. "Passion makes one the equal of the elements."

What was his gambit now? Why, obviously, he should have said, "Yes," and ventured on some unequivocal gesture. But Mr. Hutton suddenly took fright. The ginger beer in him had gone flat. The woman was serious—terribly serious. He was appalled.

Passion? "No," he desperately answered. "I am without passion."

But his remark was either unheard or unheeded, for Miss Spence went on with a growing exaltation, speaking so rapidly, however, and in such a burningly intimate whisper that Mr. Hutton found it very difficult to distinguish what she was saying. She was telling him, as far as he could make out, the story of her life. The lightning was less frequent now, and there were long intervals of darkness. But at each flash he saw her still aiming towards him, still yearning forward with a terrifying intensity. Darkness, the rain, and then flash! her face was there, close at hand. A pale mask, greenish white; the large eyes, the narrow barrel of the mouth, the heavy eyebrows. Agrippina, or wasn't it rather—yes, wasn't it rather George Robey?

He began devising absurd plans for escaping. He might suddenly jump up,

pretending he had seen a burglar—Stop thief! stop thief!—and dash off into the night in pursuit. Or should he say that he felt faint, a heart attack? or that he had seen a ghost—Emily's ghost—in the garden? Absorbed in his childish plotting, he had ceased to pay any attention to Miss Spence's words. The spasmodic clutching of her hand recalled his thoughts.

"I honoured you for that, Henry," she was saying.

Honoured him for what?

"Marriage is a sacred tie, and your respect for it, even when the marriage was, as it was in your case, an unhappy one, made me respect you and admire you, and—shall I dare say the word?—"

Oh, the burglar, the ghost in the garden! But it was too late.

". . . yes, love you, Henry, all the more. But we're free now, Henry."

Free? There was a movement in the dark, and she was kneeling on the floor by his chair.

"Oh, Henry, Henry, I have been unhappy too."

Her arms embraced him, and by the shaking of her body he could feel that she was sobbing. She might have been a suppliant crying for mercy.

"You mustn't, Janet," he protested. Those tears were terrible, terrible. "Not now, not now! You must be calm; you must go to bed." He patted her shoulder, then got up, disengaging himself from her embrace. He left her still crouching on the floor beside the chair on which he had been sitting.

Groping his way into the hall, and without waiting to look for his hat, he went out of the house, taking infinite pains to close the front door noiselessly behind him. The clouds had blown over, and the moon was shining from a clear sky. There were puddles all along the road, and a noise of running water rose from the gutters and ditches. Mr. Hutton splashed along, not caring if he got wet.

How heartrendingly she had sobbed! With the emotions of pity and remorse that the recollection evoked in him there was a certain resentment: why couldn't she have played the game that he was playing—the heartless, amusing game? Yes, but he had known all the time that she wouldn't, she couldn't, play that game; he had known and persisted.

What had she said about passion and the elements? Something absurdly stale, but true, true. There she was, a cloud black-bosomed and charged with thunder, and he, like some absurd little Benjamin Franklin, had sent up a kite into the heart of the menace. Now he was complaining that his toy had drawn the lightning.

She was probably still kneeling by that chair in the loggia, crying.

But why hadn't he been able to keep up the game? Why had his irresponsibility deserted him, leaving him suddenly sober in a cold world? There were no answers to any of his questions. One idea burned steady and luminous in his mind—the idea of flight. He must get away at once.

4

"What are you thinking about, Teddy Bear?"

"Nothing."

There was a silence. Mr. Hutton remained motionless, his elbows on the parapet of the terrace, his chin in his hands, looking down over Florence. He had taken a villa on one of the hilltops to the south of the city. From a little raised terrace at the end of the garden one looked down a long fertile valley on to the town and beyond it to the bleak mass of Monte Morello and, eastward of it, to the peopled hill of Fiesole, dotted with white houses. Everything was clear and luminous in the September sunshine.

"Are you worried about anything?"

"No, thank you."

"Tell me, Teddy Bear."

"But, my dear, there's nothing to tell." Mr. Hutton turned round, smiled, and patted the girl's hand. "I think you'd better go in and have your siesta. It's too hot for you here."

"Very well, Teddy Bear. Are you coming too?"

"When I've finished my cigar."

"All right. But do hurry up and finish it, Teddy Bear." Slowly, reluctantly, she descended the steps of the terrace and walked toward the house.

Mr. Hutton continued his contemplation of Florence. He had need to be alone. It was good sometimes to escape from Doris and the restless solicitude of her passion. He had never known the pains of loving hopelessly, but he was experiencing now the pains of being loved. These last weeks had been a period of growing discomfort. Doris was always with him, like an obsession, like a guilty conscience. Yes, it was good to be alone.

He pulled an envelope out of his pocket and opened it, not without reluctance. He hated letters; they always contained something unpleasant—nowadays, since his second marriage. This was from his sister. He began skimming through the insulting home-truths of which it was composed. The words "indecent haste," "social suicide," "scarcely cold in her grave," "person of the lower classes," all occurred. They were inevitable now in any communication from a well-meaning and right-thinking relative. Impatient, he was about to tear the stupid letter to pieces when his eye fell on a sentence at the bottom of the third page. His heart beat with uncomfortable violence as he read it. It was too monstrous! Janet Spence was going about telling everyone that he had poisoned his wife in order to marry Doris. What damnable malice! Ordinarily a man of the suavest temper, Mr. Hutton found himself trembling with rage. He took the childish satisfaction of calling names—he cursed the woman.

Then suddenly he saw the ridiculous side of the situation. The notion that he should have murdered anyone in order to marry Doris! If they only knew how miserably bored he was. Poor, dear Janet! She had tried to be malicious; she had only succeeded in being stupid.

A sound of footsteps aroused him; he looked round. In the garden below the little terrace the servant girl of the house was picking fruit. A Neapolitan, strayed somehow as far north as Florence, she was a specimen of the classical type—a little debased. Her profile might have been taken from a Sicilian coin of a bad period. Her features, carved floridly in the grand tradition, expressed an almost perfect stupidity. Her mouth was the most beautiful thing about her; the calligraphic hand of nature had richly curved it into an expression of mulish bad temper. . . . Under her hideous black clothes, Mr. Hutton divined a powerful body, firm and massive. He had looked at her before with a vague interest and curiosity. To-day the curiosity defined and focused itself into a desire. An idyll of Theocritus. Here was the woman; he, alas, was not precisely like a goatherd on the volcanic hills. He called to her.

"Armida!"

The smile with which she answered him was so provocative, attested so easy a virtue, that Mr. Hutton took fright. He was on the brink once more—on the brink. He must draw back, oh! quickly, quickly, before it was too late. The girl continued to look up at him.

"*Ha chiamato?*" she asked at last.

Stupidity or reason? Oh, there was no choice now. It was imbecility every time.

"*Scendo,*" he called back to her. Twelve steps led from the garden to the terrace. Mr. Hutton counted them. Down, down, down, down. . . . He saw a vision of himself descending from one circle of the inferno to the next—from a darkness full of wind and hail to an abyss of stinking mud.

5

For a good many days the Hutton case had a place on the front page of every newspaper. There had been no more popular murder trial since George Smith had temporarily eclipsed the European War by drowning in a warm bath his seventh bride. The public imagination was stirred by this tale of a murder brought to light months after the date of the crime. Here, it was felt, was one of those incidents in human life, so notable because they are so rare, which do definitely justify the ways of God to man. A wicked man had been moved by an illicit passion to kill his wife. For months he had lived in sin and fancied security —only to be dashed at last more horribly into the pit he had prepared for himself. "Murder will out," and here was a case of it. The readers of the newspapers were in a position to follow every movement of the hand of God. There had been vague, but persistent rumours in the neighbourhood; the police had taken action at last. Then came the exhumation order, the post-mortem examination, the inquest, the evidence of the experts, the verdict of the coroner's jury, the trial, the condemnation. For once Providence had done its duty, obviously, [illegible], didactically, as in a melodrama. The newspapers were right in making of the case the staple intellectual food of a whole season.

Mr. Hutton's first emotion when he was summoned from Italy to give evidence

at the inquest was one of indignation. It was a monstrous, a scandalous thing that the police should take such idle, malicious gossip seriously. When the inquest was over he would bring an action for malicious prosecution against the Chief Constable; he would sue the Spence woman for slander.

The inquest was opened; the astonishing evidence unrolled itself. The experts had examined the body, and had found traces of arsenic; they were of opinion that the late Mrs. Hutton had died of arsenic poisoning.

Arsenic poisoning. . . . Emily had died of arsenic poisoning? After that, Mr. Hutton learned with surprise that there was enough arsenicated insecticide in his greenhouses to poison an army.

It was now, quite suddenly, that he saw it: there was a case against him. Fascinated, he watched it growing, growing, like some monstrous tropical plant. It was enveloping him, surrounding him; he was lost in a tangled forest.

When was the poison administered? The experts agreed that it must have been swallowed eight or nine hours before death. About lunch-time? Yes, about lunch-time. Clara, the parlour-maid, was called. Mrs. Hutton, she remembered, had asked her to go and fetch her medicine. Mr. Hutton had volunteered to go instead; he had gone alone. Miss Spence—ah, the memory of the storm, the white aimed face! the horror of it all!—Miss Spence confirmed Clara's statement, and added that Mr. Hutton had come back with the medicine already poured out in a wineglass, not in the bottle.

Mr. Hutton's indignation evaporated. He was dismayed, frightened. It was all too fantastic to be taken seriously, and yet this nightmare was a fact—it was actually happening.

M'Nab had seen them kissing, often. He had taken them for a drive on the day of Mrs. Hutton's death. He could see them reflected in the wind-screen, sometimes out of the tail of his eye.

The inquest was adjourned. That evening Doris went to bed with a headache. When he went to her room after dinner, Mr. Hutton found her crying.

"What's the matter?" He sat down on the edge of her bed and began to stroke her hair. For a long time she did not answer, and he went on stroking her hair mechanically, almost unconsciously; sometimes, even, he bent down and kissed her bare shoulder. He had his own affairs, however, to think about. What had happened? How was it that the stupid gossip had actually come true? Emily had died of arsenic poisoning. It was absurd, impossible. The order of things had been broken, and he was at the mercy of an irresponsibility. What had happened, what was going to happen? He was interrupted in the midst of his thoughts.

"It's my fault—it's my fault!" Doris suddenly sobbed out. "I shouldn't have loved you; I oughten't to have let you love me. Why was I ever born?"

Mr. Hutton didn't say anything, but looked down in silence at the abject figure of misery lying on the bed.

"If they do anything to you I shall kill myself."

She sat up, held him for a moment at arm's length, and looked at him with a kind of violence, as though she were never to see him again.

"I love you, I love you, I love you." She drew him, inert and passive, towards

her, clasped him, pressed herself against him. "I didn't know you loved me as much as that, Teddy Bear. But why did you do it—why did you do it?"

Mr. Hutton undid her clasping arms and got up. His face became very red. "You seem to take it for granted that I murdered my wife," he said. "It's really too grotesque. What do you all take me for? A cinema hero?" He had begun to lose his temper. All the exasperation, all the fear and bewilderment of the day, was transformed into a violent anger against her. "It's all such damned stupidity. Haven't you any conception of a civilised man's mentality? Do I look the sort of man who'd go about slaughtering people? I suppose you imagined I was so insanely in love with you that I could commit any folly. When will you women understand that one isn't insanely in love? All one asks for is a quiet life, which you won't allow one to have. I don't know what the devil ever induced me to marry you. It was all a damned stupid, practical joke. And now you go about saying I'm a murderer. I won't stand it."

Mr. Hutton stamped towards the door. He had said horrible things, he knew —odious things that he ought speedily to unsay. But he wouldn't. He closed the door behind him.

"Teddy Bear!" He turned the handle; the latch clicked into place. "Teddy Bear!" The voice that came to him through the closed door was agonised. Should he go back? He ought to go back. He touched the handle, then withdrew his fingers and quickly walked away. When he was half-way down the stairs he halted. She might try to do something silly—throw herself out of the window or God knows what! He listened attentively; there was no sound. But he pictured her very clearly, tiptoeing across the room, lifting the sash as high as it would go, leaning out into the cold night air. It was raining a little. Under the window lay the paved terrace. How far below? Twenty-five or thirty feet? Once, when he was walking along Piccadilly, a dog had jumped out of a third-storey window of the Ritz. He had seen it fall; he had heard it strike the pavement. Should he go back? He was damned if he would; he hated her.

He sat for a long time in the library. What had happened? What was happening? He turned the question over and over in his mind and could find no answer. Suppose the nightmare dreamed itself out to its horrible conclusion. Death was waiting for him. His eyes filled with tears; he wanted so passionately to live. "Just to be alive." Poor Emily had wished it too, he remembered: "Just to be alive." There were still so many places in this astonishing world unvisited, so many queer delightful people still unknown, so many lovely women never so much as seen. The huge white oxen would still be dragging their wains along the Tuscan roads, the cypresses would still go up, straight as pillars, to the blue heaven; but he would not be there to see them. And the sweet southern wines—Tears of Christ and Blood of Judas—others would drink them, not he. Others would walk down the obscure and narrow lanes between the bookshelves in the London Library, sniffing the dusty perfume of good literature, peering at strange titles, discovering unknown names, exploring the fringes of vast domains of knowledge. He would be lying in a hole in the ground. And why, why? Confusedly he felt that some extraordinary kind of justice was being done. In the

past he had been wanton and imbecile and irresponsible. Now Fate was playing as wantonly, as irresponsibly, with him. It was tit for tat, and God existed after all.

He felt that he would like to pray. Forty years ago he used to kneel by his bed every evening. The nightly formula of his childhood came to him almost unsought from some long unopened chamber of the memory. "God bless Father and Mother, Tom and Cissie and the Baby, Mademoiselle and Nurse, and everyone that I love, and make me a good boy. Amen." They were all dead now—all except Cissie.

His mind seemed to soften and dissolve; a great calm descended upon his spirit. He went upstairs to ask Doris's forgiveness. He found her lying on the couch at the foot of the bed. On the floor beside her stood a blue bottle of liniment, marked "Not to be taken"; she seemed to have drunk about half of it.

"You didn't love me," was all she said when she opened her eyes to find him bending over her.

Dr. Libbard arrived in time to prevent any very serious consequences. "You mustn't do this again," he said while Mr. Hutton was out of the room.

"What's to prevent me?" she asked defiantly.

Dr. Libbard looked at her with his large, sad eyes. "There's nothing to prevent you," he said. "Only yourself and your baby. Isn't it rather bad luck on your baby, not allowing it to come into the world because you want to go out of it?"

Doris was silent for a time. "All right," she whispered. "I won't."

Mr. Hutton sat by her bedside for the rest of the night. He felt himself now to be indeed a murderer. For a time he persuaded himself that he loved this pitiable child. Dozing in his chair, he woke up, stiff and cold, to find himself drained dry, as it were, of every emotion. He had become nothing but a tired and suffering carcass. At six o'clock he undressed and went to bed for a couple of hours' sleep. In the course of the same afternoon the coroner's jury brought in a verdict of "Wilful Murder," and Mr. Hutton was committed for trial.

6

Miss Spence was not at all well. She had found her public appearances in the witness-box very trying, and when it was all over she had something that was very nearly a breakdown. She slept badly, and suffered from nervous indigestion. Dr. Libbard used to call every other day. She talked to him a great deal—mostly about the Hutton case. . . . Her moral indignation was always on the boil. Wasn't it appalling to think that one had had a murderer in one's house? Wasn't it extraordinary that one could have been for so long mistaken about the man's character? (But she had had an inkling from the first.) And then the girl he had gone off with—so low class, so little better than a prostitute. The news that the second Mrs. Hutton was expecting a baby—the posthumous child of a condemned and executed criminal—revolted her; the thing was shocking—an obscenity. Dr. Libbard answered her gently and vaguely, and prescribed bromide.

One morning he interrupted her in the midst of her customary tirade. "By the

way," he said in his soft, melancholy voice, "I suppose it was really you who poisoned Mrs. Hutton."

Miss Spence stared at him for two or three seconds with enormous eyes, and then quietly said, "Yes." After that she started to cry.

"In the coffee, I suppose."

She seemed to nod assent. Dr. Libbard took out his fountain-pen, and in his neat, meticulous calligraphy wrote out a prescription for a sleeping-draught.

Marie Belloc Lowndes

HER LAST ADVENTURE

1924

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1

The railway carriage door was flung open, a man sprang up the steps, and his porter began putting two Gladstone bags in the rack.

Eva Bude rose from her seat, words of protest forming themselves on her lips; for this railway carriage on the boat train had been reserved in order that she, and the junior partner of the firm who employed her as their Paris buyer, might have an important business talk on the way to London. But he had not turned up after all, and—she had seen the face of the stranger light up, as his glance had first rested on her singularly attractive-looking self.

"Will you forgive my intrusion?" he asked, in a full, caressing voice. "The train is absolutely full!"

There hovered on her lips the words: "I'm afraid I shall have to ask you to leave the carriage, if the person I am expecting arrives at the last moment."

But the words were never uttered, for the train was already in motion. A moment later the tall, dark stranger had come over to her side of the carriage and, sitting down opposite to her, he had said something which had at once amused, thrilled, and yes, allured her.

There came a time when Eva Bude made a serious attempt to reconstitute, in her own mind, everything that had happened on what became retrospectively a memorable journey. Why had she, in the first place, allowed an unknown man to share her solitude? And, above all, why had she so soon "made friends" with him?

Was it because she had just spent a week among foreigners, who, though they showed her every courtesy, and even a considerable measure of admiration, yet regarded her, as Frenchmen are apt to regard a woman who works, in an entirely

impersonal fashion? That, no doubt, had been one reason, the other—she knew it well enough—lay deep in the roots of her peculiar temperament and nature. The long level glance which her fellow-traveller, as he leapt up into the railway carriage, had cast at her, had held in it that mysterious, beckoning appeal, for which she was half consciously always watching, and to which she was almost always prepared to grant a measure of response.

As to the first words he had uttered after the train had started, they were words which she had heard many times uttered in her life of thirty-six years, and which she never wearied of hearing. Those words were: "I hope you will forgive me for saying that I think you the most beautiful woman I have ever seen!"

As for the man—his name was James Malton—he had just gone through a terrible experience which had shaken his nerve, and which, in spite of his determined effort to obliterate it from his mind, kept leaping back to his memory. He was shortly going to leave England, he believed for ever, and he was thirsting for some form of romantic adventure which would make the immediate past seem remote, and give him something delightful to remember during what he believed would be a dull, if pleasant and cloudless, future.

Given the mood of each of those fellow-travellers, it was perhaps not so very strange, after all, that long before they reached their journey's end each knew as much concerning the other as was necessary for their good understanding. But whereas the woman believed she knew everything that was worth knowing concerning her exceedingly attractive companion, all the man had learnt about his new friend was that she was a childless widow.

Neither of them had touched on the sordid question of money. That the lady was well off had become at once apparent to Malton, for she was admirably dressed in the sort of clothes that he knew too much about women not to know meant wealth of a sort. Then, if her string of real pearls was unobtrusive, the pearls were perfectly matched; and the only other jewel worn by her was a valuable emerald ring.

Though Malton was both a clever man, and a shrewd man, he came to several quite wrong conclusions during their long and apparently intimate talk.

Whereas he had told her that he had just sold his share in a house-agent's business, and that he owned an attractive little property not far from Dover, she, on her side, had refrained from giving him any hint as to her circumstances, and it was only with reluctance and hesitation that she had admitted to the Christian name of Eva, and the curious surname of Bude.

Yet such friends did they become that, by the time their train was nearing Victoria Station, Mrs. Bude had agreed to dine with Malton at the Trocadero on the following Tuesday.

She had, however, impressed upon him the fact that she must leave before midnight. He had felt it something of a triumph when she had at last consented, somewhat timorously, to give him her telegraphic address of "Bonako, Frampton-on-Thames," while making him give his word of honour that he would not try to find out her address. He had eagerly given that assurance, and it was

somewhat surprising, considering what sort of man he was, that he meant to keep his word. But he had no particular wish to know where Mrs. Bude lived. All he wished was to be so far in touch with her as to be able to communicate with her by telegram when it suited him.

As the train slowed down, she held out her hand, "I shall be really grateful, Mr. Malton," she gave him a roguish smile, "if you will go straight away, and not give yourself any trouble over me, or over my luggage!"

Malton realised that she meant what she said, and though he muttered a word of protest, he was glad to get away quickly from the station.

As he hailed a taxi, and threw the driver the address of an acquaintance who was always willing to take him as a paying guest, he told himself that his luck was indeed in! Nothing could have made him believe this morning that anything could happen that day which, for over two hours, would completely distract his mind from a terrible secret ordeal he had been through the night before.

Even so, it seemed a long time to Tuesday, but though he had made an effort to persuade Mrs. Bude to say that she would dine with him to-night, she had been adamant in her refusal.

Most of the women whom Malton attracted—and being a natural Don Juan, he had attracted a great many women on his road through life—had been gentle, malleable women. But this, his latest conquest, was evidently made of stronger metal.

There are more respectable people in the world than people who are not respectable suppose. On the other hand there are infinitely more lawless men and women in the world than law-abiding folk believe. Eva Bude was only ashamed of certain hidden phases of her life because of a public opinion she at once feared and despised; as for her new friend, he had very early in his life joined the herd of human rogue elephants.

2

"I should feel myself such a hypocrite, Eva!"

The words were said in a low, troubled voice, and the woman who uttered them was Mrs. Bude's one real friend of her own sex. They had known each other from childhood, they had been schoolmates, and though circumstances had parted them comparatively early in life, they had always kept in touch.

Now they were both widowed, but Agnes Harsham was poor, and she had four children, so she was compelled to live with her mother-in-law in the Channel Islands.

Mrs. Harsham was in London, for the first time for years, and she was spending one of her few precious days with her old friend Eva Bude, in Eva's delightful, luxuriously furnished cottage, at Frampton-on-Thames.

After a delicious little dinner, they were sitting in the rose-scented garden, and both in the mood for confidences; so Eva had told her friend what the other had thought to be an astounding fact about herself and her way of life.

"A hypocrite! Why that? I do a man's work; I make a man's income; and I

choose to lead a man's life. It's a rotten convention which forces women to be what is called 'good,' while giving every kind of license to men!"

"And does no one ever suspect, Eva?"

The woman who asked that question was small, fragile, worn-looking. As a girl she had been very attractive, but now she appeared middle-aged, though she was only thirty-four. Her thin, pale face wore an eager, excited, and yes, rather a shamed expression, as she waited for the other's answer.

"No one has ever suspected, and no one ever will suspect."

Eva Bude put out her lovely, exquisitely kept hand, and touched the trunk of the tree under which they were sitting. "Though perhaps I ought to touch wood! You see, I don't lead a double life, Agnes. I lead a triple life. First comes my working life, and I allow nothing to interfere with *that*. I see Mr. Milman once or twice a week, and then, as you know, I go four or five times a year to Paris."

A look flashed into the other's face. "Oh, Paris?"

Her friend shook her head impatiently. "Certainly not!" she rapped out. "When I'm in Paris I'm much too busy to think of anything but my work. Besides, it's a great mistake to suppose that because one's in France, one can do anything one likes. French people, as a matter of fact, are awfully prudish. Why I very seldom even lunch or dine out with a man when I'm there! Yet I'm known in every one of the big luxury trades in France as '*la Belle Madame Bude*,'" and she laughed gaily.

"I don't wonder at that," said Mrs. Harsham sincerely. "But, Eva? Tell me about your other two lives."

"Well, there's my life here, at Frampton. Though I'm a good deal away, I've kept up my tennis, and I've become quite keen on golf; also, I'm on two local women's committees. They simply *made* me come on—one of them concerns child welfare," and there was a note of triumph in her voice.

"I suppose you have very few real friends?" said the other slowly.

Eva Bude leant forward. "I wonder if you'll believe me, Agnes, when I tell you that I've never had any woman friend but you?"

Agnes Harsham put out her thin, worn hand. "Of course I've always known that, in a way—"

"You're the only person in the world to whom I could speak as I am speaking now, for all you're so prim and respectable."

"You haven't told me anything yet about your third life," Eva's one friend said in a low voice. She had felt touched, and strangely moved, by the other's words.

"There isn't much to tell, my dear! As you know, my work takes me about a good deal, and now and again, off and on"—she hesitated a moment, then exclaimed lightly—"I meet a man in whom I feel, oh—it's so difficult to explain—a sort of romantic interest."

Her voice dropped, as she went on: "Of course, I'm careful. I seldom make a mistake; also, of course, there's plenty of choice."

The other gazed at her bewildered. "D'you mean that there are a lot of men always going about looking for an adventure?" she asked incredulously.

Eva Bude laughed aloud—a ringing laugh of amusement and kindly contempt. "What sort of life can you have led, my poor dear, not to have found *that* out? But still, I confess"—she hesitated again, while the other looked at her in the now deepening twilight with keen curiosity. "I confess," Eva repeated, "that I do like a touch of real romance. I mean I should hate anything sordid."

Agnes Harsham said slowly: "You're a brave woman, Eva. I should be so horribly afraid of the possible consequences."

Then, when she saw a grin zig-zag across the other's face she cried: "You don't understand what I mean! What I should be afraid of, were I you, would be that when the affair is over, the man wouldn't give me up."

"My dear Agnes! Surely you don't think I let my temporary hero know anything about me? It doesn't often happen that I even let him know my name. Also, I always play fair. My partner in the game is told, very early in our friendship, that he will soon have to draw his wickets."

She waited a moment, then went on: "Don't misunderstand me, Agnes. I'm not always doing that sort of thing. Sometimes months go by—once it was nearly two years."

The other said, under her breath, "I see," but she was more bewildered than ever.

"And I'll tell you something else which may surprise you, my dear. I've now made up my mind to give up—well, Romance with a big R."

"You have?"

"One more little adventure, and then I settle down to absolute respectability."

"Does that mean that you are thinking of marrying again?"

"Clever girl! Perhaps it does. But if I do marry again, I'll marry a good man—the sort of man who doesn't even know the sort of thing exists which we've been talking about."

"Eva! You *are* a queer woman."

She said mockingly: "Am I? Don't reformed rakes always try and marry good, simple girls?"

"Do tell me about him; I know you've someone in your mind."

"I have, in a way. He's a friend of the Milmans, and though he's rich and good-looking too, what I like about him, my dear, is that he's a man of character without being *too* 'pi.' If I do marry him, I'll make him a thoroughly good wife. However, it's almost indecent to talk about that, as I'm on the eve of my last little fling."

3

Eva Bude stood up in the big, open motor, and gazed over the great expanse of shimmering blue sea to her right. Far away, some miles down the coast, lay Dover. But here, on the white road cut through a ledge of the Downs, they might have been a hundred miles from a town.

"This is absolutely perfect," she cried delightedly, and the man by whom she had been sitting, seized her left hand and squeezed it so hard that it almost hurt.

It was a hot July day, and the London they had left three hours ago—for Eva hated motoring too fast—had been like a furnace.

Malton, too, felt in exultantly high spirits. Though his dark, handsome face bore the marks of strain, and his bright brown eyes signs of sleeplessness, he looked as if, at last, life had given him what he had been seeking for always.

Again and again during their long drive he had congratulated himself on his marvellous good fortune. He had only three days more of England left, but they would be perfect days, spent not only with the most physically perfect, but also with the most mentally alluring woman it had ever been his luck to meet.

As she sank down into the comfortable cushioned seat, he slipped his arm round her.

"Darling!" he exclaimed. "Darling, darling, *darling!*"

"Don't be silly, Jim." But she said the words very kindly. She, too, was in an exultant mood, determined to enjoy every halcyon moment of her last adventurous journey into the kingdom of illicit romance. Her present companion had laid a strange, potent spell, if not on her heart, then on her senses, during their brief acquaintance. In a way she was glad that he was leaving England for ever.

"We shall be there in about ten minutes from now, sweetheart. You won't mind there being nobody to wait on you?"

In a low, ardent voice, he added, "I'll wait on you, my lovely perfect, goddess."

She answered merrily: "I'm not afraid of housework, Jim; and though I say it, I'm a really good cook!"

"It's far too hot for cooking. Besides, I've brought everything we're likely to want."

And his eyes rested contentedly on the huge hamper which stood on the two seats in front of them.

He was telling himself, with a touch of real sentiment, how different the future would look to him if the woman he was going to marry within ten days or a fortnight from now, the enormously rich Canadian widow whom he had met by chance in a Bournemouth hotel two months ago, resembled in even the slightest degree the woman he now held closely pressed to his side. Still, no man can expect to have all the luck! His future wife was not actively repulsive, and she certainly adored him. They would lead a very pleasant, if placid, existence on her large income, and he would keep away from his one fatal temptation—the gambling table.

"There's 'The Folly,'" he said suddenly, and Eva, turning round quickly, was surprised to see that he had become darkly red. She told herself, with a touch of tenderness, that he was an odd, emotional creature.

Malton called out to the chauffeur: "It's the first turn to the left but you'll have to be somewhat careful, for it's only a rough track, as well as very steep."

The man, who had been promised a big tip, called back cheerily: "I'll manage all right, sir, never fear! I've been in worse places than this with my car."

Halfway up the bare, almost cliff-like hill to their left, a curious-looking white house stood in an oasis of greenery.

Eva's large violet eyes, those eyes so beautiful and dove-like in their softness

when looking at a lover—yet which were so quick to see what to many women would pass unnoticed, travelled slowly over the great expanse of short turfed down which lay below the little property for which they were bound.

"What a strange, lonely place to choose for a house!" she exclaimed. And then, "It must have cost a tremendous lot of money to build it up there, even in the good old days before the war. It doesn't look a bit English," she went on thoughtfully, "in fact, I once saw a house near Monte Carlo which looked almost exactly like this house."

He was amused and pleased. How sharp and clever she was!

"As a matter of fact, you've hit the bull's eye. 'The Folly' is a copy of an Italian villa. It was built about fifty years ago by the father of the man who owns it now."

"I thought you said it belonged to you," she said quickly.

"Well, it's been practically mine for the last ten years, for the owner lives in Italy. Now and again we've managed"—he corrected himself quickly—"*I've* managed to get it let. But it's far too lonely to please the sort of people who generally want a house by the seaside."

A sudden bend in the lane brought them just below the villa, and Eva saw that the actual building was of white stone, though the terrace, which was its most arresting architectural feature, was of marble.

The terrace was supported by wide substantial brick arches, and through the arches could be seen the windows of what was apparently the ground floor of this unusual looking dwelling.

"It must be a very dark basement," she said musingly.

"Far too dark to be of any use," he said quickly.

Then, more slowly he added, "The last people who were here were American, and they insisted on having what they called a kitchenette made out of a small room beyond the dining-room. They shut up the basement altogether, and it's not been opened again. There's a good little oil stove in the kitchenette, quite good enough for any cooking we're likely to want to do."

He let his voice drop. "We'll live on bread and cheese and kisses," he whispered.

She looked round at him. "Very few men would really care to do that!" she exclaimed drily.

A few moments later Eva Bude was springing up the broad low shallow stone steps which led to the banked up platform on to which the second storey of the villa opened.

From the hanging gardens to her right floated the delicious scent of roses and jasmine and, turning round, she caught her breath at the loveliness of the scene spread out below, for the setting sun made a golden path across the pale sea.

Malton opened the high front door, and his companion noticed that the Yale lock was a new lock.

As soon as they had passed through into the curious, foreign-looking round hall, Malton hurried over to the French window opening on to the terrace, and flung it open.

But Eva stood still, looking about her. She admired the frescoed walls which formed so suitable a background to the ivory-inlaid ebony table which stood on the marble floor. Her work had taught her to be appreciative of beauty in every form.

"It's wonderful," she murmured, "wonderful! We might be hundreds of miles from England."

"I wish the man would hurry up with the hamper," said Malton impatiently. "We may as well start our honeymoon with a bottle of fizz!"

His words jarred on her. This strange and lovely house had brought back to her memory an Italian who had loved her for a longer time than she generally allowed any man to love her. He would never have said a thing like that. Also, with dismay, she realised that Malton looked tired, haggard, and, what she had never seen him yet, ill-tempered.

"He won't be a moment," she said soothingly; and he muttered, "I'll go and get the glasses and the wire-cutter."

He opened a pale, grey-painted door, and she followed him into the spacious drawing-room. There was a slight feeling of airlessness there, and this time it was she who flung open one of the three French windows. Then she turned round to find that her lover had disappeared.

The drawing-room pleased Eva less than the hall had done. The furniture, of carved wood and gilt, was Italian, and upholstered in green damask which had faded in patches. She made up her mind that only the sofa would be comfortable —the chairs were too like thrones. The carpet, of a cheap, British-made variety, swore with the rest of the room.

Malton reappeared, and Eva laughed joyously, for he looked so funny, carrying a tray with three glasses on it.

Her laugh proved infectious; his good temper came back. "I want the chap who drove us down to have a drink of the bubbly, too," he exclaimed. "I'm sure he's earned it!" And she answered: "Indeed he has."

The chauffeur, a merry-eyed little Cockney, stood in the hall, waiting by the luggage, and the big hamper. "It was a bit of a tug getting that up," he observed.

Malton opened the hamper, and took out one of six bottles of champagne. "Now then!" he exclaimed, cutting the wire. Carefully twisting out the cork he filled up the three big glasses to the brim.

"I think we ought to eat something with this," observed the one lady of the party.

A moment later a cake stood on the round table, and the same knife which had severed the strong cords binding the top of the hamper, was cutting the cake.

"I don't want you to go your way zig-zagging back to town," said Malton cheerily, and the chauffeur grinned. "No fear of that, sir!"

Eva only drank a quarter of the champagne which had fallen to her share. She was an abstemious woman, well aware of how much of her now mature beauty was due to her own good sense and care.

She felt just a little sorry to see—after the chauffeur had departed with his big tip, and order for his return in three days' time—Malton empty her glass.

4

Again and again during the three days spent by her at the villa, Eva Bude told herself that till this, her last secret adventure, had been in being, she had never known what life in its perfection could be.

She and Jim Malton appeared to be the perfect complement the one of the other. Every waking hour brought some new delightful proof of how well they were attuned. They walked, they gardened, they talked, they made love. . . . She was completely under his spell; he held her enthralled.

Small wonder that when the time came, she found herself counting the hours, measuring the minutes, almost the moments, of their last complete day.

They worked in the garden all the morning really hard. But they lazed the afternoon away on the terrace. Both felt heavy-hearted at the thought of to-morrow's parting.

For the first time a hawker called at the house, and once they saw a group of walkers on the path which edged the cliff far, far below; and the sight seemed so surprising that she turned to him and said: "This is an astonishingly lonely place, Jim, only fit—"

Catching her thought as it flew, he cried: "—for lovers!"

A moment later he exclaimed, "I wish to God we had settled to stay here a week. You won't let me telegraph to Deauville?"

It was for Deauville that he was leaving on the morrow.

She shook her head. "Oh, no; I've got a lot of business waiting for me in London," and then she sighed.

It was her first sigh. She would not allow herself to indulge in a second.

Early the next morning, just after sunrise, she awoke to see her lover bending over her.

His face was blanched, and a thrill of terror ran through her. "What's the matter?" she asked, sitting up.

"Don't you hear a noise downstairs?" he murmured affrightedly; and he gripped her arm with such force that she bore the mark of the clutch for days.

She listened intently. "No, I hear nothing, Jim."

"Listen!"

And then she did hear—curious stuffless sounds coming up from the garden below.

"It's only some animal, a sheep probably," she murmured, "I think it's got into that queer tin garden-room, near the back door."

She saw an expression of intense relief sweep over his haggard face.

"Perhaps it *is* a sheep," he whispered back.

But all at once there came the sounds of a door opening and shutting.

"You're right! Someone's gone into the basement," she exclaimed. "But how can they have opened the door, if, as you say, Jim, it's always kept locked?"

Malton's face was dusky. He was evidently convulsed with fear, and Eva felt a little amused, and yes, a little disgusted, too.

"It may be that hawker who came yesterday. Those sort of people hate sleeping out of doors. In any case I'll go down and see who it is." She added, "I'm not a bit afraid."

She was putting on her silk dressing-gown as she spoke, "How do I get down?" she asked, in a rather peremptory tone.

Malton was staring at her, still obviously unmanned.

"Perhaps it *is* that hawker," he murmured. And then, "Somehow I don't like your going downstairs all by yourself. Yet—yet I don't feel I *can* go down there."

"One gets down through that locked door in the dining-room, doesn't one?" she said quickly. "Where is the key kept?"

"I've got it here, somewhere."

She was surprised to see him get up and walk, uncertainly, to a locked chest of drawers.

As he handed her the key, he muttered, "I wonder if you'd better go down to the basement?"

She made no answer to that. Instead, she ran down to the dining-room, and put the key in the lock of the door which he had once told her led to the lower storey.

The door opened straight on to a dark steep wooden staircase, and, treading cautiously, she made her way down, down, down, till she reached the large disused kitchen.

It was very dark there, though a little of the fresh morning light filtered in between the broad arches.

Eva looked with aversion at the rusty kitchen range; and then, standing still, she listened intently.

Yes, there was certainly someone moving about next door, in what had once probably been a servants' hall.

"Who's there?" she called out boldly.

The cobwebbed door between the two rooms swung open, and a small, still boyish-looking man advanced towards her, while a refined voice exclaimed: "I'm awfully sorry madam, to have disturbed you. I haven't had any food since yesterday morning, so I'm terribly hungry. Don't be frightened. I'm not a burglar, though I fear I look like one."

"How did you get in?" she asked.

And then, in the pale light filtering in through the dirty window, she saw that the tramp smiled.

"I went into that queer little tin house you've got in the garden," he answered. "And behind the door I found a bunch of keys. I couldn't help hoping that one of them would fit the back door to this house—and it did!"

"I see."

She felt relieved. No harm in this poor little chap. And then, for she was a good-hearted woman, she said in a concerned tone: "You do look bad. If you'll

wait here a minute, I'll go upstairs and get you something to eat, and to drink, too."

He said gratefully: "You *are* kind."

For a moment she thought of asking him to come up with her. She would have done so, had she been alone in the house, for she was a fearless woman. But the thought of Malton stopped her; not that she wanted to think just then of Malton, for his attack of nerves had shocked her. Even so, she had become aware, during their short acquaintance, that he was a highly sensitive and nervous man, in spite of his air of virile strength.

She ran quickly up both flights of stairs, and opened the door behind which she found Malton waiting for her, still with an expression of craven fear on his face.

"It's all right! Only a hungry tramp. I'm giving him a bit of meat, and some bread and butter."

She hastened down into the little kitchenette where she had spent happy moments during the three days, doing odd bits of cooking, mostly of the fresh egg variety. Now she put some meat, a generous hunk of bread, and a quarter of a pound of butter on a tray, together with a bottle of beer.

Once more she made her way down the sombre deep stairway to the basement, and as, turning again into the dark kitchen, she put down the tray on a table near the window, she was woman enough to feel flattered at her unbidden guest's look of mingled gratitude and admiration.

As he fell to, ravenously, she noticed that his hands were white, and that he used his knife and fork like an educated man.

"What brought you to this pass?" she asked suddenly. "What sort of work is it that you can do?"

In reply he told her that he had been a medical student in his first term at the outbreak of war, and that he had at once joined up. Twice he had been badly wounded, and after the Armistice his physical condition had made it out of the question for him to study medicine. He had foolishly commuted his pension, and now he was penniless.

"There's an old friend of my father's living in Dover," he concluded, "I think he may help me to get some writing work."

He got up. "You have been a sport!" he exclaimed. "The more so that I'm afraid I gave you a fright."

"Well, yes, you did. The basement hasn't been used for ever so long," she said lightly. "We have a tiny kitchen upstairs."

He gave her a quick, rather peculiar look. "Someone's been cooking down here lately," he said thoughtfully. "There's a nasty smell in the next room. Would you like me to clean out the place for you?"

"Oh, no! I expect it's only a dead rat." She held out her hand. "Good-bye, and good luck!"

"The same to you," he said cordially. Then, turning, he limped across the wide kitchen.

"You'll shut the outer door and put the keys back where you found them?" she called out, just as he disappeared through the door.

He made no answer, but she could not doubt that he had heard.

She found Malton in the kitchenette busy preparing breakfast. "What I can't make out," he said uneasily, "is how the chap got in."

When she had told him he struck his right hand against the palm of his left.

"How could I have been such a fool!" he exclaimed. "But I haven't thought of that bunch of keys since—well——" he hesitated a moment, "the last tenants left."

When she came down again, dressed, the now sun-filled, tiny kitchen was empty. "Jim," she called out, "Jim! Where are you?"

But there came no answering cry of jovial welcome, and she sat down alone and ate her breakfast.

Then, all at once, Malton was there, in the doorway, a bunch of rusty keys in his hand. He looked moody, preoccupied, troubled, and she, too, felt heavy-hearted. "Our last morning," she said with a sigh.

"I can't make any key fit the back door," he said abruptly, "I've tried them all, over and over again. I thought one of them *was* the right key, but it won't turn in the lock."

"I'm certain I could make it work," she said impatiently. After all the matter was of no importance.

"Give me a little of that salad oil. It will be all right once I've oiled the rust off it."

His face cleared, as he watched her rub up the key he had detached from the ring.

She gave him a little oil in a cup, and he refused, rather curtly, to let her come too.

Off he went again, but soon he came back. "No! It's not the right key. You don't think that young chap could have taken it off the ring and gone off with it?"

She stared at him, surprised. "What possible reason could he have had to do such a thing? He may have wrenched the lock in some way when turning the key. Old locks are queer things."

Malton made no further allusion to the matter, but three times during that long morning she heard him going round the garden to the door which gave access to the basement. And each time, as he came back, she saw by his vexed, preoccupied look that he had met with disappointment.

The day had opened for them both too early, as well as badly, and she felt tired, and out of spirits.

For the first time since they had exchanged that long beckoning look in the railway carriage where had begun their strange, ardent friendship, Eva Bude felt as if Jim Malton were a stranger. She had completely lost the adoring lover who was also an admiring friend. He was now cold, preoccupied, absent-minded.

Being the manner of woman she was, Eva had made up her mind to leave everything in perfect order.

Malton watched her with a look of cynical amusement. "I don't suppose

there'll be anyone here again for years," he exclaimed brusquely, "Why give yourself so much trouble?"

The motor was late, and he paced about the sunny rooms, nervously afraid of missing the boat for France. At last, however, it arrived and, as her companion locked the front door, Eva Bude stood gazing over the sea, wishing Malton had not spoilt, by his strange moodiness, the last morning of her last adventure.

As they drove quickly to Dover they had the car closed, for neither he nor she wished anyone to see them.

It was a strange, silent drive, but when they drew up near the jetty, he crushed her to him with something of his old ardour, and tears started to her beautiful eyes.

She waited till the boat started, and then she brushed her tears away, and, as she drove on, alone, there came over her a sincere feeling of relief that she had now done, for ever, with the secret joys and dangers of lawless love.

5

"A gentleman for you, ma'am. I think he said his name was Eaton."

Mrs. Bude turned round quickly from her writing-table, and there ran through her mind just a very slight sensation of discomfort and surprise. She knew no one of the name of Eaton, she was not expecting a caller, and she was very busy.

It was the first of September, and a great deal had happened in the two months which had elapsed since she had come back from the short holiday Mr. Milman had willingly granted to his highly valued buyer.

Poor Mr. Milman! He was as yet happily unconscious of the fact that Mrs. Bude was going to give him notice on the morrow.

Eva had accepted this morning an offer of marriage from the man of whom she had spoken to her friend Agnes Harsham. And she was writing to Agnes now, telling her the great news.

When the maid opened the door she had just written the words:

> "I am happier than I thought it possible any human being could ever be in this drab world. Harry is an angel, and he thinks me one, too! I know you think me a hard, worldly woman, Agnes, but I would still marry Harry if he became ruined to-morrow. You will laugh at me, but I feel, now, that, I know for the first time what *real* love is, and can be. I feel like a girl, a lovely, pure, innocent girl, rejoicing in her first love——"

"As you didn't say you was expecting anyone, ma'am, I left the gentleman in the hall," went on the well-trained maid.

"Show him in," said Mrs. Bude quickly.

A moment later she was shaking hands with her visitor, and deciding quickly in her own mind that he was a professional man of good stamp.

She also told herself wordlessly that he was ill at ease. Indeed for a moment or two he did not say anything. He simply stood gazing at her fixedly, and there

was no touch of the admiration to which she was accustomed in the quiet keen glance.

It was she who at last broke a silence which had become oppressive.

"May I enquire why you wish to see me?" she asked suavely.

He answered at once, in quick, incisive tones. "I have come on what I am afraid is unpleasant business, Mrs. Bude."

"Unpleasant business?" she echoed.

The colour rushed into her face. Everything in her business life was absolutely above board.

In the world in which she moved, and where she held so high and secure a place, there were both men and women who sometimes talked, half jokingly, of the ways in which they could "bilk" the income tax. But she, Eva Bude, always said, and it was true, "I put *everything* in—though, of course, I keep a very exact record of my expenses!"

There came such a look of real astonishment and troubled perplexity on the lovely face now turned enquiringly towards him, that Mr. Eaton felt that perhaps the carefully-built-up story, the truth of which he had come to probe, might be going to turn out, at any rate inasmuch as it concerned this charming lady, a mare's nest.

And though the way of his life made him, if not exactly a hard man, then a man whom it was almost impossible to surprise, so familiar had he become with the astonishing tricks and strange turns of our poor fallible human nature, her feminine charm so far affected him that he began to hope that a mistake had been made.

Everything he knew about Mrs. Bude—and he had learnt a great deal about her in the last few days—was entirely to her credit. Her name was widely known and respected in that branch of the wholesale trade where she was so successful, and though she was there known as "the beautiful Mrs. Bude," there had apparently never been a word against her character.

"Do sit down," she said courteously.

He sat down; and then, after a pause, he asked what he knew to be a crucial question: "May I take it, Mrs. Bude, that your telegraphic address is 'Bonako, Frampton'?"

"Yes," she said quickly. "What of it?"

She saw his face change, and a slight tremor of fear came over her.

He opened his black attaché case, and, taking out of it a telegraph form, handed it to her. She read:

"*Copy.*

The Old Cottage, Frampton-on-Thames. Handed in at Dover, 3.25, delivered Frampton, 4.17, July 3rd.

The motor meets you Waterloo three o'clock to-morrow.—JIM."

She stared down at the piece of paper with a feeling of terror in her heart. Could this mean—it must mean—that she was about to be cited as co-respondent in a divorce case? That Malton's account of himself had been a lie from beginning

to end; that he was not a widower, but a married man; and that his wife had had him watched?

Suddenly she remembered the tramp! *He* must have been the detective who had tracked them down. Mr. Eaton was, of course, a solicitor. How stupid of her not to have guessed it sooner. Still she might, even so, manage to keep out of the case.

"I did receive that telegram," she said at last, in a low voice, and looking down as she spoke.

"Do you admit having motored in the company of one James Malton, to a house called 'The Folly,' some eight miles from Dover?"

She said: "Am I bound to answer that question?" and moistened her lips with her tongue nervously.

He made no reply to that for a few moments, and she added, "I suppose you are Mrs. Malton's solicitor?"

"*Mrs.* Malton?" he repeated questioningly. "I do not think she has an English lawyer."

Then he said, in a firm impressive tone, "I think it best to be frank with you, Mrs. Bude. I belong to the Criminal Investigation Department at Scotland Yard."

To his amazement he saw a look of relief flash over her face.

Eva Bude was a clever and a well-informed woman, but even so, she supposed, in her ignorance, that Scotland Yard, among its other attributes, has that of taking a hand in obtaining evidence with regard to divorce cases. So it was a great relief to her to learn that she was not dealing with a private firm of solicitors, or, worse still, with a private firm of detectives. It was within her knowledge that a high official at Scotland Yard had been very kind, with regard to a difficult and delicate matter concerning a case of blackmail. She also knew that the person who had received valuable assistance had been an attractive woman, though not nearly as attractive as she, Eva, was herself.

Tears—how amazed her visitor would have been had he realised that they were tears of relief!—began trickling down her cheeks.

"I was only at 'The Folly,' three days," she whispered, "and if it's ever found out, I mean if I'm brought into a horrible divorce case, it will be my ruin, Mr. Eaton, not only as a business woman—"

And then she stopped; she would not mention her engagement unless she were driven to it.

"I have been a widow many years. I was very lonely—"

She stopped again, aware that he was looking at her with a thoughtful, measuring glance, as if wondering whether she were really telling him the truth.

Desperately she went on. "Surely, *surely*, you can do something to help me? Surely, especially now, it won't be necessary for my name to appear in the papers? I have often read in divorce cases the phrase 'an unknown woman.'"

He said suddenly: "How long had you known James Malton, Mrs. Bude? I suppose your acquaintance with him was of short standing?"

She bowed her head. Feelings of acute, agonising shame seemed to envelop her as in tongues of fire.

"I—I can't remember exactly when I did first meet him," she faltered; and at once he knew that she was not telling the truth.

"Try and remember," he said coldly.

She looked at him pleadingly. "What is it I ought to remember?"

And the half-appeal went home. Mr. Eaton was beginning to feel very sorry for this beautiful woman.

"I will be honest with you, Mrs. Bude. We know a great deal about Malton, but we do not know whether your acquaintance with the man was of long standing. Whether, for instance, you had ever been to 'The Folly' in his company before?"

"Never," she said eagerly. "Never! I swear it! It was the first time I had ever done anything of that kind."

Again her eyes dropped before his passionless scrutiny.

"Then I may take it that your acquaintance with Malton was of very short duration?"

Reluctantly, very reluctantly, she murmured, "Yes."

"You were abroad on business from the 9th to the 19th of June. May I assume that you had not yet met James Malton before you went to Paris?"

She made no answer for what seemed to them both a very long time. Should she lie, or should she admit the truth?

The fact that Mr. Eaton was a Scotland Yard official made up her mind for her. Wisely—far more wisely than she knew—she decided for the truth.

"I met him," she said, in a strangled voice, "on my journey home that time. I mean during the railway journey from Dover to London."

Again he glanced at his book. "I see. A fortnight almost to a day before you and he went to the house called 'The Folly' together?"

She felt too humiliated, too ashamed, to do more than bend her head.

"And now," he said, "we come to certain events which occurred while you were at 'The Folly.'"

She looked at him dumbly. To what events could he be referring? Nothing had happened which could possibly be called an "event" during those three days.

He opened a note-book. "Early on the morning of July the sixth a tramp effected an entrance into the basement of the house. As a matter of fact he was looking for food. You heard the sounds made by him, and you came downstairs in your dressing-gown. Then you went upstairs and procured him some food. You told him that the basement had not been used for a long time, and then he commented on the fact that there was a peculiar odour in the scullery. You answered that it was probably caused by a dead rat."

Eva Bude stared at her visitor. What an astonishing thing that those few idle words which she had quite forgotten, but which she now recalled, should be repeated to her now!

Again she told herself that the man who had so imposed on her good nature had, of course, been a detective.

"Yes, I remember his coming quite well," she said with quivering lip.

"The young man—his name is Skinner—locked the back door behind him.

But he took away the key. A week ago he went back to the house, and a certain suspicion he had formed when he was there before was confirmed by him. Quite properly he then went to the Dover police station."

She said uncertainly: "Why did he do that? There was no one there when he went again—was there?"

He looked at her significantly. "On the occasion of Mr. Skinner's second visit there was no one alive in the house."

He slightly accentuated the word "alive."

As she said nothing, only looked at him with puzzled, frightened eyes, he asked another, and a final, question. "I suppose you had no occasion to go again into the basement of the house, Mrs. Bude?"

The colour rushed into her face. "I was only in the basement that one time. It's quite cut off from the rest of the house. What little cooking I had occasion to do was done on an oil stove in a little room upstairs."

She was becoming more and more bewildered. Yet the turn this curious conversation had taken was giving her a measure of comfort and re-assurance.

She realised, now, that no ordinary divorce case could be in question.

Suddenly her visitor leant forward.

"I am afraid," he said very gravely, "that I am going to give you a great shock, Mrs. Bude."

The colour had come back into her face; for she was beginning to see that the mystery concerned not herself, but either young Skinner or James Malton.

Mr. Eaton opened out a piece of paper he held in his hand. "I have here a plan of the basement."

She got up and bent over the paper, while he, pointing with a pencil, observed, "Here is the kitchen in which you had that talk with the man Skinner."

"Yes?" she said hesitatingly.

"Here, next to it, is the scullery, almost as large, you will observe, as is the kitchen. Beyond the kitchen is a cellar."

He waited a moment; then said slowly, impressively, "Now in that cellar, Mrs. Bude, was found, just five days ago, the body of a woman. That woman was Malton's first wife."

The words formed themselves on her lips: "Malton's first wife?" but she did not utter them aloud. She only stared at him, while terror slowly filled her beautiful eyes.

"We have reason to suppose that there will be no difficulty in proving that the last woman James Malton took there before he took you there was his wife, and that he left her there, dead or alive, on the afternoon that you and he met for the first time."

"How horrible!" she murmured; and for a moment he feared she was going to faint.

"The opening day of the inquest has been fixed for next Saturday morning. I have with me a subpœna calling for your attendance. By that time the extradition formalities will have been completed, and we hope Malton will be present."

"Present?" she echoed stupidly.

"Yes, we discovered his whereabouts quite easily. He was with his new wife, a rich Canadian lady, at Deauville. But for Skinner, and but"—he added with unconscious cruelty—"for your going down to Skinner, and giving him that food, and letting him stay there long enough to take his bearings, so to speak, and—you'll pardon my mentioning something so unpleasant—giving him the opportunity of sniffing that curious odour, the body of that poor woman might not have been found, one may almost say, for years. Malton had already sent the absent owner the purchase money for the house."

"Can *nothing* save me, Mr. Eaton? *Must* I appear at the inquest?"

She was looking at him with eyes dilated with terror.

"I'm afraid you must be at the inquest; and further, if Malton is committed for trial, you will, of course, have to give evidence at the trial."

He waited a moment: "Here is the summons to attend the inquest," he murmured.

She took it from his hand, and then she walked over to the fireplace and rang the bell.

After he had gone Eva Bude went to her writing-table and took up the letter she had been writing to her friend.

Violently she tore it across and across—and then, setting fire to the pieces, she watched them burn.

E. W. Hornung

THE WRONG HOUSE

from RAFFLES

Charles Scribner's Sons

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My brother Ralph, who now lived with me on the edge of Ham Common, had come home from Australia with a curious affection of the eyes, due to long exposure to the glare out there, and necessitating the use of clouded spectacles in the open air. He had not the rich complexion of the typical colonist, being indeed peculiarly pale, but it appeared that he had been confined to his berth for the greater part of the voyage, while his prematurely grey hair was sufficient proof that the rigours of bush life had at last undermined an originally tough constitution. Our landlady, who spoilt my brother from the first, was much con-

cerned on his behalf, and wished to call in the local doctor; but Ralph said dreadful things about the profession, and quite frightened the good woman by arbitrarily forbidding her ever to let a doctor inside her door. I had to apologise to her for the painful prejudices and violent language of "these colonists," but the old soul was easily mollified. She had fallen in love with my brother at first sight, and she never could do too much for him. It was owing to our landlady that I took to calling him Ralph, for the first time in our lives, on her beginning to speak of and to him as "Mr. Raffles."

"This won't do," said he to me. "It's a name that sticks."

"It must be my fault! She must have heard it from me," said I self-reproachfully.

"You must tell her it's the short for Ralph."

"But it's longer."

"It's the short," said he; "and you've got to tell her so."

Henceforth I heard as much of "Mr. Ralph," his likes and his dislikes, what he would fancy and what he would not, and ah, what a dear gentleman he was, that I often remembered to say, "Ralph, old chap," myself.

It was an ideal cottage, as I said when I found it, and in it our delicate man became rapidly robust. Not that the air was also ideal, for, when it was not raining, we had the same faithful mist from November to March. But it was something to Ralph to get any air at all, other than night air, and the bicycle did the rest. We taught ourselves, and may I never forget our earlier rides, through and through Richmond Park when the afternoons were shortest, upon the incomparable Ripley Road when we gave a day to it. Raffles rode a Beeston Humber, a Royal Sunbeam was good enough for me, but he insisted on our both having Dunlop tyres.

"They seem the most popular brand. I had my eye on the road all the way from Ripley to Cobham, and there were more Dunlop marks than any other kind. Bless you, yes, they all leave their special tracks, and we don't want ours to be extra special; the Dunlop's like a rattlesnake, and the Palmer leaves telegraph-wires, but surely the serpent is more in our line."

That was the winter when there were so many burglaries in the Thames Valley from Richmond upward. It was said that the thieves used bicycles in every case, but what is not said? They were sometimes on foot to my knowledge, and we took a great interest in the series, or rather sequence of successful crimes. Raffles would often get his devoted old lady to read him the latest local accounts, while I was busy with my writing (much I wrote) in my own rooms.

We even rode out by night ourselves, to see if we could not get on the tracks of the thieves, and never did we fail to find hot coffee on the hob for our return. We had indeed fallen upon our feet. Also, the misty nights might have been made for the thieves. But their success was not so consistent, and never so enormous, as people said, especially the sufferers, who lost more valuables than they had ever been known to possess. Failure was often the caitiffs' portion, and disaster once; owing, ironically enough, to that very mist which should have

served them. But as I am going to tell the story with some particularity, and perhaps some gusto, you will see why, who read.

The right house stood on high ground near the river, with quite a drive (in at one gate and out at the other) sweeping past the steps. Between the two gates was a half-moon of shrubs, to the left of the steps a conservatory, and to their right the walk leading to the tradesmen's entrance and the back premises; here also was the pantry window, of which more anon. The right house was the residence of an opulent stockbroker who wore a heavy watch-chain and seemed fair game. There would have been two objections to it had I been the stockbroker. The house was one of a row, though a goodly row, and an army-crammer had established himself next door. There is a type of such institutions in the suburbs; the youths go about in knickerbockers, smoking pipes, except on Saturday nights, when they lead each other home from the last train. It was none of our business to spy upon these boys, but their manners and customs fell within the field of observation. And we did not choose the night upon which the whole row was likely to be kept awake.

The night that we did choose was as misty as even the Thames Valley is capable of making them. Raffles smeared vaseline over the plated parts of his Beeston Humber before starting, and our dear landlady cosseted us both, and prayed we might see nothing of the nasty burglars, not denying us the reward would be very handy to them that got it, to say nothing of the honour and glory. We had promised her a liberal perquisite in the event of our success, but she must not give other cyclists our idea by mentioning it to a soul. It was about midnight when we cycled through Kingston to Surbiton, having trundled our machines across Ham Fields, mournful in the mists as those by Acheron, and so over Teddington Bridge.

I often wonder why the pantry window is the vulnerable point of nine houses out of ten. This house of ours was almost the tenth, for the window in question had bars of sorts, but not the right sort. The only bars that Raffles allowed to beat him were the kind that are let into the stone outside; those fixed within are merely screwed to the woodwork, and you can unscrew as many as necessary if you take the trouble and have the time. Barred windows are usually devoid of other fasteners worthy the name; this one was no exception to that foolish rule, and a push with the penknife did its business. I am giving householders some valuable hints, and perhaps deserving a good mark from the critics. These, in any case, are the points that I would see to, were I a rich stockholder in a riverside suburb. In giving good advice, however, I should not have omitted to say that we had left our machines in the semicircular shrubbery in front, or that Raffles had most ingeniously fitted our lamps with dark slides, which enabled us to leave them burning.

It proved sufficient to unscrew the bars at the bottom only, and then to wrench them to either side. Neither of us had grown stout with advancing years, and in a few minutes we had both wormed through into the sink, and thence to the floor. It was not an absolutely noiseless process, but once in the pantry we were mice, and no longer blind mice. There was a gas-bracket, but we did not meddle

with that. Raffles went armed these nights with a better light than gas; if it were not immoral, I might recommend a dark-lantern which was more or less his patent. It was that handy invention, the electric torch, fitted by Raffles with a dark hood to fulfill the functions of a slide. I had held it through the bars while he undid the screws, and now he held it to the keyhole, in which a key was turned upon the other side.

There was a pause for consideration, and in the pause we put on our masks. It was never known that these Thames Valley robberies were all committed by miscreants decked in the livery of crime, but that was because until this night we had never even shown our masks. It was a point upon which Raffles had insisted on all feasible occasions since his furtive return to the world. To-night it twice nearly lost us everything—but you shall hear.

There is a forceps for turning keys from the wrong side of the door, but the implement is not so easy of manipulation as it might be. Raffles for one preferred a sharp knife and the corner of the panel. You go through the panel because that is thinnest, of course in the corner nearest the key, and you use a knife when you can, because it makes the least noise. But it does take minutes, and even I can remember shifting the electric torch from one hand to the other, before the aperture was large enough to receive the hand and wrist of Raffles.

He had at such times a motto of which I might have made earlier use, but the fact is that I have only once before described a downright burglary in which I assisted, and that without knowing it at the time. The most solemn student of these annals, cannot affirm that he has cut through many doors in our company, since (what was to me) the maiden effort to which I allude. I, however, have cracked only too many a crib in conjunction with A. J. Raffles, and at the crucial moment he would whisper "Victory or Wormwood Scrubbs, Bunny!" or instead of Wormwood Scrubbs it might be Portland Bill. This time it was neither one nor the other, for with that very word "victory" upon his lips, they whitened and parted with the first taste of defeat.

"My hand's held!" gasped Raffles, and the white of his eyes showed all round the iris, a rarer thing than you may think.

At the same moment I heard the shuffling feet and the low excited young voices on the other side of the door, and a faint light shone round Raffles's wrist.

"Well done, Beefy!"

"Hang on to him!"

"Good old Beefy!"

"Beefy's got him!"

"So have I—so have I!"

And Raffles caught my arm with his one free hand. "They've got me tight," he whispered. "I'm done."

"Blaze through the door," I urged, and might have done it had I been armed. But I never was. It was Raffles who monopolised that risk.

"I can't—it's the boys—the wrong house!" he whispered. "Curse the fog—it's done me. But you get out, Bunny, while you can; never mind me; it's my turn, old chap."

His one hand tightened in affectionate farewell. I put the electric torch in it before I went, trembling in every inch, but without a word.

Get out! His turn! Yes, I would get out, but only to come in again, for it was my turn—mine—not his. Would Raffles leave me held by a hand through a hole in a door? What he would have done in my place was the thing for me to do now. I began by diving head first through the pantry window and coming to earth upon all fours. But even as I stood up, and brushed the gravel from the palms of my hands and the knees of my knickerbockers, I had no notion what to do next. And yet I was half-way to the front door before I remembered the vile crape mask upon my face, and tore if off as the door flew open, and my feet were on the steps.

"He's into the next garden," I cried to a bevy of pyjamas with bare feet and young faces at either end of them.

"Who? Who?" said they giving way before me.

"Some fellow who came through one of your windows head first."

"The other Johnny, the other Johnny," the cherubs chorused.

"Biking past—saw the light—why, what have you there?"

Of course it was Raffles's hand that they had, but now I was in the hall among them. A red-faced barrel of a boy did all the holding, one hand round the wrist, the other palm to palm, and his knees braced up against the panel. Another was rendering ostentatious but ineffectual aid, and three or four others danced about in their pyjamas. After all, they were not more than four to one. I had raised my voice, so that Raffles might hear me and take heart, and now I raised it again. Yet to this day I cannot account for my inspiration, that proved nothing less.

"Don't talk so loud," they were crying below their breath; "don't wake 'em upstairs, this is our show."

"Then I see you've got one of them," said I as desired. "Well, if you want the other you can have him too. I believe he's hurt himself."

"After him, after him!" they exclaimed as one.

"But I think he got over the wall—"

"Come on, you chaps, come on!"

And there was a soft stampede to the hall door.

"Don't all desert me, I say!" gasped the red-faced hero who held Raffles prisoner.

"We must have them both, Beefy!"

"That's all very well—"

"Look here," I interposed, "I'll stay by you. I've a friend outside, I'll get him too."

"Thanks awfully," said the valiant Beefy. The hall was empty now. My heart beat high.

"How did you hear them?" I inquired, my eye running over him.

"We were down having drinks—game o' nap—in there."

Beefy jerked his great head towards an open door, and the tail of my eye caught the glint of glasses in the firelight, but the rest of it was otherwise engaged.

"Let me relieve you," I said, trembling.

"No, I'm all right."

"Then I must insist."

And before he could answer, I had him round the neck with such a will that not a gurgle passed my fingers, for they were almost buried in his hot smooth flesh. Oh, I am not proud of it; the act was as vile as act could be; but I was not going to see Raffles taken, my one desire was to be the saving of him, and I tremble even now to think to what lengths I might have gone for its fulfilment. As it was I squeezed and tugged until one strong hand gave way after the other and came feeling round for me, but feebly because they had held on so long. And what do you suppose was happening at the same moment? The pinched white hand of Raffles, reddening with the returning blood, and with a clot of blood upon the wrist, was craning upward and turning the key in the lock without a moment's loss.

"Steady on, Bunny!"

And I saw that Beefy's ears were blue; but Raffles was feeling in his pockets as he spoke. "Now let him breathe," said he, clapping his handkerchief over the poor youth's mouth. An empty phial was in his other hand, and the first few stertorous breaths that the poor boy took were the end of him for the time being.

Oh, but it was villainous, my part especially, for he must have been far gone to go the rest of the way so readily. I began by saying I was not proud of this deed, but its dastardly character has come home to me more than ever with the penance of writing it out. I see in myself, at least my then self, things that I never saw quite so clearly before. Yet let me be quite sure that I would not do the same again. I had not the smallest desire to throttle this innocent lad (nor did I), but only to extricate Raffles from the most hopeless position he was ever in; and after all it was better than a blow from behind. On the whole, I will not alter a word, nor whine about the thing any more.

We lifted the plucky fellow into Raffles's place in the pantry, locked the door on him, and put the key through the panel. Now was the moment for thinking of ourselves, and again that infernal mask which Raffles swore by, came near the undoing of us both. We had reached the steps when we were hailed by a voice, not from without but from within, and I had just time to tear the accursed thing from Raffles's face before he turned.

A stout man with a blonde moustache was on the stairs, in his pyjamas like the boys.

"What are you doing here?" said he.

"There has been an attempt upon your house," said I, still spokesman for the night, and still on the wings of inspiration. "Your sons——"

"My pupils."

"Indeed. Well, they heard it, drove off the thieves, and have given chase."

"And where do you come in?" enquired the stout man, descending.

"We were bicycling past, and I actually saw one fellow come head first through your pantry window. I think he got over the wall."

Here a breathless boy returned.

"Can't see anything of him," he gasped.

"It's true, then," remarked the crammer.

"Look at that door," said I.

But unfortunately the breathless boy looked also, and now he was being joined by others equally short of wind.

"Where's Beefy?" he screamed. "What on earth's happened to Beefy?"

"My good boys," exclaimed the crammer, "will one of you be kind enough to tell me what you've been doing, and what these gentlemen have been doing for you? Come in all, before you get your death. I see lights in the class-room, and more than lights. Can these be signs of a carouse?"

"A very innocent one, sir," said a well-set-up youth with more moustache than I have yet.

"Well, Olphert, boys will be boys. Suppose you tell me what happened, before we come to recriminations."

The bad old proverb was my first warning. I caught two of the youths exchanging glances under raised eye-brows. Yet their stout easy-going mentor had given me such a reassuring glance of sidelong humour, as between man of the world and man of the world, that it was difficult to suspect him of suspicion. I was nevertheless itching to be gone.

Young Olphert told his story with engaging candour. It was true that they had come down for an hour's nap and cigarettes; well, and there was no denying that was whisky in the glasses. The boys were now all back in their class-room, I think entirely for the sake of warmth; but Raffles and I were in knickerbockers and Norfolk jackets, and very naturally remained without, while the army-crammer (who wore bedroom slippers) stood on the threshold, with an eye each way. The more I saw of the man the better I liked and the more I feared him. His chief annoyance thus far was, that they had not called him when they heard the noise, that they had dreamt of leaving him out of the fun. But he seemed more hurt than angry about that.

"Well, sir," concluded Olphert, "we left old Beefy Smith hanging on to his hand, and this gentleman with him, so perhaps he can tell us what happened next?"

"I wish I could," I cried, with all their eyes upon me, for I had had time to think. "Some of you must have heard me say I'd fetch my friend in from the road?"

"Yes, I did," piped an innocent from within.

"Well, and when I came back with him things were exactly as you see them now. Evidently the man's strength was too much for the boy's; but whether he ran upstairs or outside, I know no more than you do."

"It wasn't like that boy to run either way," said the crammer, cocking a clear blue eye on me.

"But if he gave chase!"

"It wasn't like him even to let go."

"I don't believe Beefy ever would," put in Olphert. "That's why we gave him the billet."

"He may have followed him through the pantry window,"I suggested wildly.

"I'll have a look at it," said the crammer.

And the key no longer in the lock, and the insensible youth within! The key would be missed, the door kicked in; nay, with the man's eye still upon me, I thought I could smell chloroform, I thought I could hear a moan, and prepared for either any moment. And how he did stare! I have detested blue eyes ever since, and blonde moustaches, and the whole stout easy-going type that is not such a fool as it looks. I had brazened it out with the boys, but the first grown man was too many for me, and the blood ran out of my heart as though there was no Raffles at my back. Indeed, I had forgotten him. I had so longed to put this thing through by myself! Even in my extremity it was almost a disappointment to me, when his dear cool voice fell like a delicious draught upon my ears. But its effect upon the others is more interesting to recall. Until now the crammer had the centre of the stage, but at this point Raffles usurped a place which was always his at will. People would wait for what he had to say, as these people waited now for the simplest and most natural thing in the world.

"One moment!" he had begun.

"Well?" said the crammer, relieving me of his eyes at last.

"I don't want to lose any of the fun——"

"Nor must you," said the crammer, with emphasis.

"But we've left our bikes outside, and mine's a Beeston Humber," continued Raffles. "If you don't mind, we'll bring 'em in before these fellows get away on them."

And out he went without a look to see the effect of his words, I after him with a determined imitation of his self-control. But I would have given something to turn round. I believe that for one moment the shrewd instructor was taken in, but as I reached the steps I heard him asking his pupils whether any of them had seen any bicycles outside.

That moment, however, made the difference. We were in the shrubbery, Raffles with his electric torch drawn and blazing, when we heard them kicking at the pantry-door, and in the drive with our bicycles before man and boys poured pell-mell down the steps.

We rushed our machines to the nearer gate, for both were shut, and we got through and swung it home behind us in the nick of time. Even I could mount before they could reopen the gate, which Raffles held against them for half an instant with unnecessary gallantry. But he would see me in front of him, and so it fell to me to lead the way.

Now, I have said that it was a very misty night (hence the whole thing) and also that these houses were on a hill. But they were not nearly on the top of the hill, and I did what I firmly believe that almost everybody would have done in my place. Raffles, indeed, said he would have done it himself, but that was his generosity, and he was the one man who would not. What I did was to turn in

the opposite direction to the other gate, where we might so easily have been cut off, and to pedal for my life—up-hill!

"My God!" I shouted when I found it out.

"Can you turn in your own length?" asked Raffles, following loyally.

"Not certain."

"Then stick to it. You couldn't help it. But it's the devil of a hill!"

"And here they come!"

"Let them," said Raffles, and brandished his electric torch, our only light as yet.

A hill seems endless in the dark, for you cannot see the end, and with the patter of bare feet gaining on us, I thought this one could have no end at all. Of course the boys could charge up it quicker than we could pedal, but I even heard the voice of their stout instructor growing louder through the mist.

"Oh, to think I've let you in for this!" I groaned, my head over the handle-bars, every ounce of my weight first on one foot and then on the other. I glanced at Raffles, and in the white light of his torch he was doing it all with his ankles, exactly as though he had been riding in a Gymkhana.

"It's the most sporting chase I was ever in," said he.

"All my fault!"

"My dear Bunny, I wouldn't have missed it for the world!"

Nor would he forge ahead of me, though he could have done so in a moment, he who from his boyhood, had done everything of the kind so much better than anybody else. No, he must ride a wheel's length behind me, and now we could not only hear the boys running, but breathing also. And then of a sudden I saw Raffles on my right striking with his torch; a face flew out of the darkness to meet the thick glass bulb with the glowing wire enclosed; it was the face of the boy Olphert, with his enviable moustache, but it vanished with the crash of glass, and the naked wire thickened to the eye like a tuning-fork struck red-hot.

I saw no more of that. One of them had crept up on my side also; as I looked, hearing him pant, he was grabbing at my left handle, and I nearly sent Raffles into the hedge by the sharp turn I took to the right. His wheel's length saved him. But my boy could run, was overhauling me again, seemed certain of me this time, when all at once the Sunbeam ran easily; every ounce of my weight with either foot once more, and I was over the crest of the hill, the grey road reeling out from under me as I felt for my brake. I looked back at Raffles. He had put up his feet. I screwed my head round still farther, and there were the boys in their pyjamas, their hands upon their knees, like so many wicket-keepers, and a big man shaking his fist. There was a lamp-post on the hill-top, and that was the last I saw.

We sailed down to the river, then on through Thames Ditton as far as Esher station, when we turned sharp to the right, and from the dark stretch by Imber Court came to light in Molesey, and were soon pedalling like gentlemen of leisure through Bushey Park, our lights turned up, the broken torch put out and away. The big gates had long been shut, but you can manœuvre a bicycle through

the others. We had no further adventures on the way home, and our coffee was still warm upon the hob.

"But I think it's an occasion for Sullivans," said Raffles, who now kept them for such. "By all my gods, Bunny, it's been the most sporting night we ever had in our lives! And do you know which was the most sporting part of it?"

"That up-hill ride!"

"I wasn't thinking of it."

"Turning your torch into a truncheon?"

"My dear Bunny! A gallant lad—I hated hitting him."

"I know," I said. "The way you got us out of the house!"

"No, Bunny," said Raffles, blowing rings. "It came before that, you sinner, and you know it!"

"You don't mean anything I did?" said I, self-consciously, for I began to see that this was what he did mean. And now at last it will also be seen why this story has been told with undue and inexcusable gusto; there is none other like it for me to tell; it is my one ewe-lamb in all these annals. But Raffles had a ruder name for it.

"It was the Apotheosis of the Bunny," said he, but in a tone I never shall forget.

"I hardly knew what I was doing or saying," I said. "The whole thing was a fluke."

"Then," said Raffles, "it was the kind of fluke I always trusted you to make when runs were wanted."

And he held out his dear old hand.

SECTION II

STORIES OF THE SUPERNATURAL

Mrs. Oliphant

THE OPEN DOOR

from Stories of the Seen and the Unseen

Blackwood, 1881

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I took the house of Brentwood on my return from India in 18–, for the temporary accommodation of my family, until I could find a permanent home for them. It had many advantages which made it peculiarly appropriate. It was within reach of Edinburgh, and my boy Roland, whose education had been considerably neglected, could go in and out to school, which was thought to be better for him than either leaving home altogether or staying there always with a tutor. The first of these expedients would have seemed preferable to me, the second commended itself to his mother. The doctor, like a judicious man, took the midway between. "Put him on his pony, and let him ride into the High School every morning; it will do him all the good in the world," Dr. Simson said: "and when it is bad weather there is the train." His mother accepted the solution of the difficulty more easily than I could have hoped; and our pale-faced boy, who had never known anything more invigorating than Simla, began to encounter the brisk breezes of the North in the subdued severity of the month of May. Before the time of the vacation in July we had the satisfaction of seeing him begin to acquire something of the brown and ruddy complexion of his schoolfellows. The English system did not commend itself to Scotland in these days. There was no little Eton at Fettes; nor do I think, if there had been, that a genteel exotic of that class would have tempted either my wife or me. The lad was doubly precious to us, being the only one left us of many; and he was fragile in body we believed, and deeply sensitive in mind. To keep him at home, and yet to send him to school—to combine the advantages of the two systems—seemed to be everything that could be desired. The two girls also found at Brentwood everything they wanted. They were near enough to Edinburgh to have masters and lessons as many as they required for completing that never-ending education which the young people seem to require nowadays. Their mother married me when she was younger than Agatha, and I should like to see them improve upon their mother! I myself was then no more than twenty-five—an age at which I see the young fellows now groping about them, with no notion what they are going to do with their lives. However, I suppose every generation has a

conceit of itself which elevates it, in its own opinion, above that which comes after it.

Brentwood stands on that fine and wealthy slope of country, one of the richest in Scotland, which lies between the Pentland Hills and the Firth. In clear weather you could see the blue gleam—like a bent bow, embracing the wealthy fields and scattered houses—of the great estuary on one side of you; and on the other the blue heights, not gigantic like those we had been used to, but just high enough for all the glories of the atmosphere, the play of clouds, and sweet reflections, which give to a hilly country an interest and a charm which nothing else can emulate. Edinburgh, with its two lesser heights—the Castle and the Calton Hill—its spires and towers piercing through the smoke, and Arthur's Seat lying crouched behind, like a guardian no longer very needful, taking his repose beside the well-beloved charge, which is now, so to speak, able to take care of itself without him—lay at our right hand. From the lawn and drawing-room windows we could see all these varieties of landscape. The colour was sometimes a little chilly, but sometimes, also, as animated and full of vicissitude as a drama. I was never tired of it. Its colour and freshness revived the eyes which had grown weary of arid plains and blazing skies. It was always cheery, and fresh, and full of repose.

The village of Brentwood lay almost under the house, on the other side of the deep little ravine, down which a stream—which ought to have been a lovely, wild, and frolicsome little river—flowed between its rocks and trees. The river, like so many in that district, had, however, in its earlier life been sacrificed to trade, and was grimy with paper-making. But this did not affect our pleasure in it so much as I have known it to affect other streams. Perhaps our water was more rapid—perhaps less clogged with dirt and refuse. Our side of the dell was charmingly *accidenté*, and clothed with fine trees through which various paths wound down to the river-side and to the village bridge which crossed the stream. The village lay in the hollow, and climbed, with very prosaic houses, the other side. Village architecture does not flourish in Scotland. The blue slates and the grey stones are sworn foes to the picturesque; and though I do not, for my own part, dislike the interior of an old-fashioned pewed and galleried church, with its little family settlements on all sides, the square box outside, with its bit of a spire like a handle to lift it by, is not an improvement to the landscape. Still, a cluster of houses on differing elevations—with scraps of garden coming in between, a hedgerow with clothes laid out to dry, the opening of a street with its rural sociability, the women at their doors, the slow waggon lumbering along—gives a centre to the landscape. It was cheerful to look at, and convenient in a hundred ways. Within ourselves we had walks in plenty, the glen being always beautiful in all its phases, whether the woods were green in the spring or ruddy in the autumn. In the park which surrounded the house were the ruins of the former mansion of Brentwood, a much smaller and less important house than the solid Georgian edifice which we inhabited. The ruins were picturesque, however, and gave importance to the place. Even we, who were but temporary tenants, felt a vague pride in them, as if they somehow reflected a certain con-

sequence upon ourselves. The old building had the remains of a tower, an indistinguishable mass of mason-work, overgrown with ivy, and the shells of walls attached to this were half filled up with soil. I had never examined it closely, I am ashamed to say. There was a large room, or what had been a large room with the lower part of the windows still existing, on the principal floor, and underneath other windows, which were perfect, though half filled up with fallen soil, and waving with a wild growth of brambles and chance growths of all kinds. This was the oldest part of all. At a little distance were some very commonplace and disjointed fragments of the building, one of them suggesting a certain pathos by its very commonness and the complete wreck which it showed. This was the end of a low gable, a bit of grey wall, all encrusted with lichens, in which was a common doorway. Probably it had been a servants' entrance, a back-door, or opening into what are called "the offices" in Scotland. No offices remained to be entered—pantry and kitchen had all been swept out of being; but there stood the doorway open and vacant, free to all the winds, to the rabbits, and every wild creature. It struck my eye, the first time I went to Brentwood, like a melancholy comment upon a life that was over. A door that led to nothing—closed once perhaps with anxious care, bolted and guarded, now void of any meaning. It impressed me, I remember, from the first; so perhaps it may be said that my mind was prepared to attach to it an importance, which nothing justified.

The summer was a very happy period of repose for us all. The warmth of Indian suns was still in our veins. It seemed to us that we could never have enough of the greenness, the dewiness, the freshness of the northern landscape. Even its mists were pleasant to us, taking all the fever out of us, and pouring in vigour and refreshment. In autumn we followed the fashion of the time, and went away for change which we did not in the least require. It was when the family had settled down for the winter, when the days were short and dark, and the rigorous reign of frost upon us, that the incidents occurred which alone could justify me in intruding upon the world my private affairs. These incidents were, however, of so curious a character, that I hope my inevitable references to my own family and pressing personal interests will meet with a general pardon.

I was absent in London when these events began. In London an old Indian plunges back into the interests with which all his previous life has been associated, and meets old friends at every step. I had been circulating among some half-dozen of these—enjoying the return to my former life in shadow, though I had been so thankful in substance to throw it aside—and had missed some of my home letters, what with going down from Friday to Monday to old Benbow's place in the country, and stopping on the way back to dine and sleep at Sellar's and to take a look into Cross's stables, which occupied another day. It is never safe to miss one's letters. In this transitory life, as the Prayer-book says, how can one ever be certain what is going to happen? All was well at home. I knew exactly (I thought) what they would have to say to me: "The weather has been so fine, that Roland has not once gone by train, and he enjoys the ride beyond anything." "Dear papa, be sure that you don't forget anything, but bring us so-

and-so and so-and-so"—a list as long as my arm. Dear girls and dearer mother! I would not for the world have forgotten their commissions, or lost their little letters, for all the Benbows and Crosses in the world.

But I was confident in my home-comfort and peacefulness. When I got back to my club, however, three or four letters were lying for me, upon some of which I noticed the "immediate," "urgent," which old-fashioned people and anxious people still believe will influence the post-office and quicken the speed of the mails. I was about to open one of these, when the club porter brought me two telegrams, one of which, he said, had arrived the night before. I opened, as was to be expected, the last first, and this was what I read: "Why don't you come or answer? For God's sake, come. He is much worse." This was a thunderbolt to fall upon a man's head who had only one son, and he the light of his eyes! The other telegram, which I opened with hands trembling so much that I lost time by my haste, was to much the same purport: "No better; doctor afraid of brain-fever. Calls for you day and night. Let nothing detain you." The first thing I did was to look up the time-tables to see if there was any way of getting off sooner than by the night-train, though I knew well enough there was not; and then I read the letters, which furnished, alas! too clearly, all the details. They told me that the boy had been pale for some time, with a scared look. His mother had noticed it before I left home, but would not say anything to alarm me. This look had increased day by day; and soon it was observed that Roland came home at a wild gallop through the park, his pony panting and in foam, himself "as white as a sheet," but with the perspiration streaming from his forehead. For a long time he had resisted all questioning, but at length had developed such strange changes of mood, showing a reluctance to go to school, a desire to be fetched in the carriage at night—which was a ridiculous piece of luxury—an unwillingness to go out into the grounds, and nervous start at every sound, that his mother had insisted upon an explanation. When the boy—our boy Roland, who had never known what fear was—began to talk to her of voices he had heard in the park, and shadows that had appeared to him among the ruins, my wife promptly put him to bed and sent for Dr. Simson—which, of course, was the only thing to do.

I hurried off that evening, as may be supposed, with an anxious heart. How I got through the hours before the starting of the train, I cannot tell. We must all be thankful for the quickness of the railway when in anxiety; but to have thrown myself into a post-chaise as soon as horses could be put to, would have been a relief. I got to Edinburgh very early in the blackness of the winter morning, and scarcely dared look the man in the face at whom I gasped "What news?" My wife had sent the brougham for me, which I concluded, before the man spoke, was a bad sign. His answer was that stereotyped answer which leaves the imagination so wildly free—"Just the same." Just the same! What might that mean? The horses seemed to me to creep along the long dark country-road. As we dashed through the park, I thought I heard some one moaning among the trees, and clenched my fist at him (whoever he might be) with fury. Why had the fool of a woman at the gate allowed any one to come in to disturb the quiet of the place?

If I had not been in such hot haste to get home, I think I should have stopped the carriage and got out to see what tramp it was that had made an entrance, and chosen my grounds, of all places in the world—when my boy was ill—to grumble and groan in. But I had no reason to complain of our slow pace here. The horses flew like lightning along the intervening path, and drew up at the door all panting, as if they had run a race. My wife stood waiting to receive me with a pale face, and a candle in her hand, which made her look paler still as the wind blew the flame about. "He is sleeping," she said in a whisper, as if her voice might wake him. And I replied, when I could find my voice, also in a whisper, as though the jingling of the horses' furniture and the sound of their hoofs must not have been more dangerous. I stood on the steps with her a moment, almost afraid to go in, now that I was here; and it seemed to me that I saw without observing, if I may say so, that the horses were unwilling to turn round, though their stables lay that way, or that the men were unwilling. These things occurred to me afterwards, though at the moment I was not capable of anything but to ask questions and to hear of the condition of the boy.

I looked at him from the door of his room, for we were afraid to go near, lest we should disturb that blessed sleep. It looked like actual sleep—not the lethargy into which my wife told me he would sometimes fall. She told me everything in the next room, which communicated with his, rising now and then and going to the door of communication; and in this there was much that was very startling and confusing to the mind. It appeared that ever since the winter began, since it was early dark and night had fallen before his return from school, he had been hearing voices among the ruins—at first only a groaning, he said, at which his pony was as much alarmed as he was, but by degrees a voice. The tears ran down my wife's cheeks as she described to me how he would start up in the night and cry out, "Oh, mother, let me in! oh, mother, let me in!" with a pathos which rent her heart. And she sitting there all the time, only longing to do everything his heart could desire! But though she would try to soothe him, crying, "You are at home, my darling. I am here. Don't you know me? Your mother is here," he would only stare at her, and after a while spring up again with the same cry. At other times he would be quite reasonable, she said, asking eagerly when I was coming, but declaring that he must go with me as soon as I did so, "to let them in." "The doctor thinks his nervous system must have received a shock," my wife said. "Oh, Henry, can it be that we have pushed him on too much with his work—a delicate boy like Roland?—and what is his work in comparison with his health? Even you would think little of honours or prizes if it hurt the boy's health." Even I! as if I were an inhuman father sacrificing my child to my ambition. But I would not increase her trouble by taking any notice. After a while they persuaded me to lie down, to rest, and to eat—none of which things had been possible since I received their letters. The mere fact of being on the spot, of course, in itself was a great thing; and when I knew that I would be called in a moment, as soon as he was awake and wanted me, I felt capable, even in the dark, chill morning twilight, to snatch an hour or two's sleep. As it happened, I was so worn out with the strain of anxiety, and he so quieted and

consoled by knowing I had come, that I was not disturbed till the afternoon, when the twilight had again settled down. There was just daylight enough to see his face when I went to him; and what a change in a fortnight! He was paler and more worn, I thought, than even in those dreadful days in the plains before we left India. His hair seemed to me to have grown long and lank; his eyes were like blazing lights projecting out of his white face. He got hold of my hand in a cold and tremulous clutch, and waved to everybody to go away. "Go away —even mother," he said—"go away." This went to her heart, for she did not like that even I should have more of the boy's confidence than herself; but my wife has never been a woman to think of herself, and she left us alone. "Are they all gone?" he said, eagerly. "They would not let me speak. The doctor treated me as if I were a fool. You know I am not a fool, papa."

"Yes, yes, my boy, I know; but you are ill, and quiet is so necessary. You are not only not a fool, Roland, but you are reasonable and understand. When you are ill you must deny yourself; you must not do everything that you might do being well."

He waved his thin hand with a sort of indignation. "Then, father, I am not ill," he cried. "Oh, I thought when you came you would not stop me—you would see the sense of it! What do you think is the matter with me, all of you? Simson is well enough, but he is only a doctor. What do you think is the matter with me? I am no more ill than you are. A doctor, of course, he thinks you are ill the moment he looks at you—that's what he's there for—and claps you into bed."

"Which is the best place for you at present, my dear boy."

"I made up my mind," cried the little fellow, "that I would stand it till you came home. I said to myself, I won't frighten mother and the girls. But now, father," he cried, half jumping out of bed, "it's not illness—it's a secret."

His eyes shone so wildly, his face was so swept with strong feeling, that my heart sank within me. It could be nothing but fever that did it, and fever had been so fatal. I got him into my arms to put him back into bed. "Roland," I said, humouring the poor child, which I knew was the only way, "if you are going to tell me this secret to do any good, you know you must be quite quiet, and not excite yourself. If you excite yourself, I must not let you speak."

"Yes, father," said the boy. He was quiet directly, like a man, as if he quite understood. When I had laid him back on his pillow, he looked up at me with that grateful, sweet look with which children, when they are ill, break one's heart, the water coming into his eyes in his weakness. "I was sure as soon as you were here you would know what to do," he said.

"To be sure, my boy. Now keep quiet, and tell it all out like a man." To think I was telling lies to my own child! for I did it only to humour him, thinking, poor little fellow, his brain was wrong.

"Yes, father. Father, there is some one in the park—some one that has been badly used."

"Hush, my dear; you remember, there is to be no excitement. Well, who is this somebody, and who has been ill-using him? We will soon put a stop to that."

"Ah," cried Roland, "but it is not so easy as you think. I don't know who it is.

It is just a cry. Oh, if you could hear it! It gets into my head in my sleep. I heard it as clear as clear; and they think that I am dreaming—or raving perhaps," the boy said, with a sort of disdainful smile.

This look of his perplexed me; it was less like fever than I thought. "Are you quite sure you have not dreamt it, Roland?" I said.

"Dreamt?—that!" He was springing up again when he suddenly bethought himself, and lay down flat with the same sort of smile on his face. "The pony heard it too," he said. "She jumped as if she had been shot. If I had not grasped at the reins—for I was frightened, father—"

"No shame to you, my boy," said I, though I scarcely knew why.

"If I hadn't held to her like a leech, she'd have pitched me over her head, and she never drew breath till we were at the door. Did the pony dream it?" he said, with a soft disdain, yet indulgence for my foolishness. Then he added slowly: "It was only a cry the first time, and all the time before you went away. I wouldn't tell you, for it was so wretched to be frightened. I thought it might be a hare or a rabbit snared, and I went in the morning and looked, but there was nothing. It was after you went I heard it really first, and this is what he says." He raised himself on his elbow close to me, and looked me in the face. "'Oh, mother, let me in! oh, mother, let me in.'" As he said the words a mist came over his face, the mouth quivered, the soft features all melted and changed, and when he had ended these pitiful words, dissolved in a shower of heavy tears.

Was it a hallucination? Was it the fever of the brain? Was it the disordered fancy caused by great bodily weakness? How could I tell? I thought it wisest to accept it as if it were all true.

"This is very touching, Roland," I said.

"Oh, if you had just heard it, father! I said to myself, 'if father heard it he would do something'; but mamma, you know, she's given over to Simson, and that fellow's a doctor, and never thinks of anything but clapping you into bed."

"We must not blame Simson for being a doctor, Roland."

"No, no," said my boy, with delightful toleration and indulgence; "oh, no; that's the good of him—that's what he's for; I know that. But you—you are different; you are just father: and you'll do something—directly, papa, directly—this very night."

"Surely," I said. "No doubt, it is some little lost child."

He gave me a sudden, swift look, investigating my face as though to see whether, after all, this was everything my eminence as "father" came to—no more than that? Then he got hold of my shoulder, clutching it with his thin hand: "Look here," he said, with a quiver in his voice; "suppose it wasn't—living at all!"

"My dear boy, how then could you have heard it?" I said.

He turned away from me, with a pettish exclamation—"As if you didn't know better than that!"

"Do you want to tell me it is a ghost?" I said.

Roland withdrew his hand; his countenance assumed an aspect of great dignity and gravity; a slight quiver remained about his lips. "Whatever it was—you al-

ways said we were not to call names. It was something—in trouble. Oh, father, in terrible trouble!"

"But, my boy," I said—I was at my wits' end—"if it was a child that was lost, or any poor human creature——but, Roland, what do you want me to do?"

"I should know if I was you," said the child, eagerly. "That is what I always said to myself—'Father will know.' Oh, papa, papa, to have to face it night after night, in such terrible, terrible trouble! and never be able to do it any good. I don't want to cry; it's like a baby, I know; but what can I do else?—out there all by itself in the ruin, and nobody to help it. I can't bear it, I can't bear it!" cried my generous boy. And in his weakness he burst out, after many attempts to restrain it, into a great childish fit of sobbing and tears.

I do not know that I ever was in a greater perplexity in my life; and afterwards, when I thought of it, there was something comic in it too. It is bad enough to find your child's mind possessed with the conviction that he has seen—or heard —a ghost. But that he should require you to go instantly and help that ghost, was the most bewildering experience that had ever come my way. I am a sober man myself, and not superstitious—at least any more than everybody is superstitious. Of course I do not believe in ghosts; but I don't deny, any more than other people, that there are stories which I cannot pretend to understand. My blood got a sort of chill in my veins at the idea that Roland should be a ghost-seer; for that generally means a hysterical temperament and weak health, and all that men most hate and fear for their children. But that I should take up his ghost and right its wrongs, and save it from its trouble, was such a mission as was enough to confuse any man. I did my best to console my boy without giving any promise of this astonishing kind; but he was too sharp for me. He would have none of my caresses. With sobs breaking in at intervals upon his voice, and the rain-drops hanging on his eyelids, he yet returned to the charge.

"It will be there now—it will be there all the night. Oh think, papa, think, if it was me! I can't rest for thinking of it. Don't!" he cried, putting away my hand—"don't! You go and help it, and mother can take care of me."

"But, Roland, what can I do?"

My boy opened his eyes, which were large with weakness and fever, and gave me a smile such, I think, as sick children only know the secret of. "I was sure you would know as soon as you came. I always said—'Father will know'; and mother," he cried, with a softening of repose upon his face, his limbs relaxing, his form sinking with a luxurious ease in his bed—"mother can come and take care of me."

I called her, and saw him turn to her with the complete dependence of a child, and then I went away and left them, as perplexed a man as any in Scotland. I must say, however, I had this consolation, that my mind was greatly eased about Roland. He might be under a hallucination, but his head was clear enough, and I did not think him so ill as everybody else did. The girls were astonished even at the ease with which I took it. "How do you think he is?" they said in a breath, coming round me, laying hold of me. "Not half so ill as I expected," I said; "not very bad at all." "Oh, papa, you are a darling," cried Agatha, kissing me, and

crying upon my shoulder; while little Jeanie, who was as pale as Roland, clasped both her arms round mine, and could not speak at all. I knew nothing about it, not half so much as Simson; but they believed in me; they had a feeling that all would go right now. God is very good to you when your children look to you like that. It makes one humble, not proud. I was not worthy of it; and then I recollected that I had to act the part of a father to Roland's ghost, which made me almost laugh, though I might just as well have cried. It was the strangest mission that ever was entrusted to mortal man.

It was then I remembered suddenly the looks of the men when they turned to take the brougham to the stables in the dark that morning: they had not liked it, and the horses had not liked it. I remembered that even in my anxiety about Roland I had heard them tearing along the avenue back to the stables, and had made a memorandum mentally that I must speak of it. It seemed to me that the best thing I could do was to go to the stables now and make a few enquiries. It is impossible to fathom the minds of rustics; there might be some devilry of practical joking, for anything I knew; or they might have some interest in getting up a bad reputation for the Brentwood avenue. It was getting dark by the time I went out, and nobody who knows the country will need to be told how black is the darkness of a November night under high laurel-bushes and yew-trees. I walked into the heart of the shrubberies two or three times, not seeing a step before me, till I came out upon the broader carriage-road, where the trees opened a little, and there was a faint grey glimmer of sky visible, under which the great limes and elms stood darkling like ghosts; but it grew black again as I approached the corner where the ruins lay. Both eyes and ears were on the alert, as may be supposed; but I could see nothing in the absolute gloom, and, so far as I can recollect, I heard nothing. Nevertheless, there came a strong impression upon me that somebody was there. It is a sensation which most people have felt. I have seen when it has been strong enough to awake me out of sleep, the sense of some one looking at me. I suppose my imagination had been affected by Roland's story; and the mystery of the darkness is always full of suggestions. I stamped my feet violently on the gravel to rouse myself, and called out sharply, "Who's there?" Nobody answered, nor did I expect any one to answer, but the impression had been made. I was so foolish that I did not like to look back, but went sideways, keeping an eye on the gloom behind. It was with great relief that I spied the light in the stables, making a sort of oasis in the darkness. I walked very quickly into the midst of that lighted and cheerful place, and thought the clank of the groom's pail one of the pleasantest sounds I had ever heard. The coachman was the head of this little colony, and it was to his house I went to pursue my investigations. He was a native of the district, and had taken care of the place in the absence of the family for years; it was impossible but that he must know everything that was going on, and all the traditions of the place. The men, I could see, eyed me anxiously when I thus appeared at such an hour among them, and followed me with their eyes to Jarvis's house, where he lived alone with his old wife, their children being all married and out in the world. Mrs. Jarvis met me with anxious questions. How was the poor young gentleman?

but the others knew, I could see by their faces, that not even this was the foremost thing in my mind.

"Noises?—ou ay, there'll be noises—the wind in the trees, and the water soughing down the glen. As for tramps, Cornel, no, there's little o' that kind of cattle about here; and Merran at the gate's a careful body." Jarvis moved about with some embarrassment from one leg to another as he spoke. He kept in the shade, and did not look at me more than he could help. Evidently his mind was perturbed, and he had reasons for keeping his own counsel. His wife sat by, giving him a quick look now and then, but saying nothing. The kitchen was very snug, and warm, and bright—as different as could be from the chill and mystery of the night outside.

"I think you are trifling with me, Jarvis," I said.

"Triflin', Cornel? not me. What would I trifle for? If the deevil himsel' was in the auld hoose, I have no interest in't one way or another—"

"Sandy, hold your peace!" cried his wife imperatively.

"And what am I to hold my peace for, wi' the Cornel standing there asking a' thae questions? I'm saying, if the deevil himsel'—"

"And I'm telling ye hold your peace!" cried the woman, in great excitement. "Dark November weather and lang nichts, and us that ken a' we ken. How daur ye name—a name that shouldna be spoken?" She threw down her stocking and got up, also in great agitation. "I tell't ye you never could keep it. It's no a thing that will hide; and the haill toun kens as weel as you or me. Tell the Cornel straight out—or see, I'll do it. I dinna hold wi' your secrets; and a secret that the haill toun kens!" She snapped her fingers with an air of large disdain. As for Jarvis, ruddy and big as he was, he shrank to nothing before this decided woman. He repeated to her two or three times her own adjuration, "Hold your peace!" then, suddenly changing his tone, cried out, "Tell him then, confound ye! I'll wash my hand o't. If a' the ghosts in Scotland were in the auld hoose, is that ony concern o' mine?"

After this I elicited without much difficulty the whole story. In the opinion of the Jarvises, and of everybody about, the certainty that the place was haunted was beyond all doubt. As Sandy and his wife warmed to the tale, one tripping up another in their eagerness to tell everything, it gradually developed as distinct a superstition as I ever heard, and not without poetry and pathos. How long it was since the voice had been heard first, nobody could tell with certainty. Jarvis's opinion was that his father, who had been coachman at Brentwood before him, had never heard anything about it, and that the whole thing had arisen within the last ten years, since the complete dismantling of the old house: which was a wonderfully modern date for a tale so well authenticated. According to these witnesses, and to several whom I questioned afterwards, and who were all in perfect agreement, it was only in the months of November and December that "the visitation" occurred. During these months, the darkest of the year, scarcely a night passed without the recurrence of these inexplicable cries. Nothing, it was said, had ever been seen—at least nothing that could be identified. Some people,

bolder or more imaginative than the others, had seen the darkness moving, Mrs. Jarvis said, with unconscious poetry. It began when night fell and continued, at intervals, till day broke. Very often it was only an inarticulate cry and moaning, but sometimes the words which had taken possession of my poor boy's fancy had been distinctly audible—"Oh, mother, let me in!" The Jarvises were not aware that there had ever been any investigation into it. The estate of Brentwood had lapsed into the hands of a distant branch of the family, who had lived but little there; and of the many people who had taken it, as I had done, few had remained through two Decembers. And nobody had taken the trouble to make a very close examination into the facts. "No, no," Jarvis said, shaking his head. "No, no, Cornel. Wha wad set themsels up for a laughin'-stock to a' the countryside, making a wark about a ghost? Naebody believes in ghosts. It bid to be the wind in the trees, the last gentleman said, or some effec' o' the water wrastlin' among the rocks. He said it was a' quite easy explained: but he gave up the hoose. And when you cam, Cornel, we were awfu' anxious you should never hear. What for should I have spoiled the bargain and hairmed the property for no-thing?"

"Do you call my child's life nothing?" I said in the trouble of the moment, unable to restrain myself. "And instead of telling this all to me, you have told it to him—to a delicate boy, a child unable to sift evidence, or judge for himself, a tender-hearted young creature—"

I was walking about the room with an anger all the hotter that I felt it to be most likely quite unjust. My heart was full of bitterness against the stolid retainers of a family who were content to risk other people's children and comfort rather than let the house lie empty. If I had been warned I might have taken precautions, or left the place, or sent Roland away, a hundred things which now I could not do; and here I was with my boy in a brain-fever, and his life, the most precious life on earth, hanging in the balance, dependent on whether or not I could get to the reason of a commonplace ghost-story! I paced about in high wrath, not seeing what I was to do; for, to take Roland away, even if he were able to travel, would not settle his agitated mind; and I feared even that a scientific explanation of refracted sound, or reverberation, or any other of the easy certainties with which we elder men are silenced, would have very little effect upon the boy.

"Cornel," said Jarvis, solemnly, "and *she'll* bear me witness—the young gentleman never heard a word from me—no, nor from either groom or gardener; I'll gie ye my word for that. In the first place, he's no a lad that invites ye to talk. There are some that are, and some that are na. Some will draw ye on, till ye've tellt them a' the clatter of the toun, and a' ye ken, and whiles mair. But Maister Roland, his mind's fu' of his books. He's aye civil and kind, and a fine lad; but no that sort. And ye see it's for a' our interest, Cornel, that you should stay at Brentwood. I took it upon me mysel' to pass the word—'No a syllable to Maister Roland, nor to the young leddies—no a syllable.' The women-servants, that have little reason to be out at night, ken little or nothing about it. And some think it grand to have a ghost so long as they're no in the way of coming across it. If

you had been tellt the story to begin with, maybe ye would have thought so yourself."

This was true enough, though it did not throw any light upon my perplexity. If we had heard of it to start with, it is possible that all the family would have considered the possession of a ghost a distinct advantage. It is the fashion of the times. We never think what a risk it is to play with young imaginations, but cry out, in the fashionable jargon, "A ghost!—nothing else was wanted to make it perfect." I should not have been above this myself. I should have smiled, of course, at the idea of the ghost at all, but then to feel that it was mine would have pleased my vanity. Oh, yes, I claim no exemption. The girls would have been delighted. I could fancy their eagerness, their interest, and excitement. No; if we had been told, it would have done no good—we should have made the bargain all the more eagerly, the fools that we are. "And there has been no attempt to investigate it," I said, "to see what it really is?"

"Eh, Cornel," said the coachman's wife, "wha would investigate, as ye call it, a thing that nobody believes in? Ye would be the laughing-stock of a' the country-side, as my man says."

"But you believe in it," I said, turning upon her hastily. The woman was taken by surprise. She made a step backward out of my way.

"Lord, Cornel, how he frichten a body! Me!—there's awful strange things in this world. An unlearned person doesna ken what to think. But the minister and the gentry they just laugh in your face. Enquire into the thing that is not! Na, na, we just let it be."

"Come with me, Jarvis," I said, hastily, "and we'll make an attempt at least. Say nothing to the men or to anybody. I'll come back after dinner, and we'll make a serious attempt to see what it is, if it is anything. If I hear it—which I doubt—you may be sure I shall never rest till I make it out. Be ready for me about ten o'clock."

"Me, Cornel!" Jarvis said, in a faint voice. I had not been looking at him in my own preoccupation, but when I did so, I found that the greatest change had come over the fat and ruddy coachman. "Me, Cornel!" he repeated, wiping the perspiration from his brow. His ruddy face hung in flabby folds, his knees knocked together, his voice seemed half extinguished in his throat. Then he began to rub his hands and smile upon me in a deprecating, imbecile way. "There's nothing I wouldna do to pleasure ye, Cornel," taking a step further back. "I'm sure *she* kens I've aye said I never had to do with a mair fair, weelspoken gentleman—" Here Jarvis came to a pause, again looking at me, rubbing his hands.

"Well?" I said.

"But eh, sir!" he went on, with the same imbecile yet insinuating smile, "if ye'll reflect that I am no used to my feet. With a horse atween my legs, or the reins in my hand, I'm maybe nae worse than other men; but on fit, Cornel—It's no the—bogles;—but I've been cavalry, ye see," with a little hoarse laugh, "a' my life. To face a thing ye didna understan'—on your feet, Cornel—"

"Well, sir, if *I* do it," said I tartly, "why shouldn't you?"

"Eh, Cornel, there's an awfu' difference. In the first place, ye tramp about

the haill country-side, and think naething of it; but a walk tires me mair than a hunard miles' drive; and then ye'e a gentleman, and do your ain pleasure; and you're no so auld as me; and it's for your ain bairn, ye see, Cornel; and then—"

"He believes in it, Cornel, and you dinna believe in it," the woman said.

"Will you come with me?" I said, turning to her.

She jumped back, upsetting her chair in her bewilderment. "Me!" with a scream, and then fell into a sort of hysterical laugh. "I wouldna say but what I would go; but what would the folk say to hear of Cornel Mortimer with an auld silly woman at his heels?"

The suggestion made me laugh too, though I had little inclination for it. "I'm sorry you have so little spirit, Jarvis," I said. "I must find some one else, I suppose."

Jarvis, touched by this, began to remonstrate, but I cut him short. My butler was a soldier who had been with me in India, and was not supposed to fear anything—man or devil—certainly not the former; and I felt that I was losing time. The Jarvises were too thankful to get rid of me. They attended me to the door with the most anxious courtesies. Outside, the two grooms stood close by, a little confused by my sudden exit. I don't know if perhaps they had been listening—at least standing as near as possible, to catch any scrap of the conversation. I waved my hand to them as I went past, in answer to their salutations, and it was very apparent to me that they also were glad to see me go.

And it will be thought very strange, but it would be weak not to add, that I myself, though bent on the investigation I have spoken of, pledged to Roland to carry it out, and feeling that my boy's health, perhaps his life, depended on the result of my enquiry—I felt the most unaccountable reluctance to pass these ruins on my way home. My curiosity was intense; and yet it was all my mind could do to pull my body along. I daresay the scientific people would describe it the other way, and attribute my cowardice to the state of my stomach. I went on; but if I had followed my impulse, I should have turned and bolted. Everything in me seemed to cry out against it; my heart thumped, my pulses all began, like sledge-hammers, beating against my ears and every sensitive part. It was very dark, as I have said; the old house, with its shapeless tower, loomed a heavy mass through the darkness, which was only not entirely so solid as itself. On the other hand, the great dark cedars of which we were so proud seemed to fill up the night. My foot strayed out of the path in my confusion and the gloom together, and I brought myself up with a cry as I felt myself knock against something solid. What was it? The contact with hard stone and lime, and prickly bramblebushes, restored me a little to myself. "Oh, it's only the old gable," I said aloud, with a little laugh to reassure myself. The rough feeling of the stones reconciled me. As I groped about thus, I shook off my visionary folly. What so easily explained as that I should have strayed from the path in the darkness? This brought me back to common existence, as if I had been shaken by a wise hand out of all the silliness of superstition. How silly it was, after all! What did it matter which path I took? I laughed again, this time with better heart —when suddenly, in a moment, the blood was chilled in my veins, a shiver stole

along my spine, my faculties seemed to forsake me. Close by me at my side, at my feet, there was a sigh. No, not a groan, not a moaning, not anything so tangible—a perfectly soft, faint, inarticulate sigh. I sprang back, and my heart stopped beating. Mistaken! no, mistake was impossible. I heard it as clearly as I hear myself speak; a long, soft, weary sigh, as if drawn to the utmost, and emptying out a load of sadness that filled the breast. To hear this in the solitude, in the dark, in the night (though it was still early), had an effect which I cannot describe. I feel it now—something cold creeping over me, up into my hair, and down to my feet, which refused to move. I cried out with a trembling voice, "Who is there?" as I had done before—but there was no reply.

I got home—I don't quite know how; but in my mind there was no longer any indifference as to the thing, whatever it was, that haunted these ruins. My scepticism disappeared like a mist. I was as firmly determined that there was something as Roland was. I did not for a moment pretend to myself that it was possible I could be deceived; there were movements and noises which I understood all about, cracklings of small branches in the frost, and little rolls of gravel on the path, such as have a very eerie sound sometimes, and perplexes you with wonder as to who has done it, *when there is no real mystery*; but I assure you all these little movements of nature don't affect you one bit *when there is something*. I understood *them*. I did not understand the sigh. That was not simple nature; there was meaning in it—feeling, the soul of a creature invisible. This is the thing that human nature trembles at—a creature invisible, yet with sensations, feelings, a power somehow of expressing itself. I had not the same sense of unwillingness to turn my back upon the scene of the mystery which I had experienced in going to the stables; but I almost ran home, impelled by eagerness to get everything done that had to be done in order to apply myself to finding it out. Bagley was in the hall as usual when I went in. He was always there in the afternoon, always with the appearance of perfect occupation, yet, so far as I know, never doing anything. The door was open, so that I hurried in without any pause, breathless; but the sight of his calm regard, as he came to help me off with my overcoat, subdued me in a moment. Anything out of the way, anything incomprehensible, faded to nothing in the presence of Bagley. You saw and wondered how *he* was made: the parting of his hair, the tie of his white neckcloth, the fit of his trousers, all perfect as works of art; but you could see how they were done, which makes all the difference. I flung myself upon him, so to speak, without waiting to note the extreme unlikeness of the man to anything of the kind I meant. "Bagley," I said, "I want you to come out with me to-night to watch for—"

"Poachers, Colonel," he said, a gleam of pleasure running all over him.

"No, Bagley; a great deal worse," I cried.

"Yes, Colonel; at what hour, sir?" the man said; but then I had not told him what it was.

It was ten o'clock when we set out. All was perfectly quiet indoors. My wife was with Roland, who had been quite calm, she said, and who (though, no doubt, the fever must run its course) had been better since I came. I told

Bagley to put on a thick greatcoat over his evening coat, and did the same myself—with strong boots; for the soil was like a sponge, or worse. Talking to him, I almost forgot what we were going to do. It was darker even than it had been before, and Bagley kept very close to me as we went along. I had a small lantern in my hand, which gave us a partial guidance. We had come to the corner where the path turns. On one side was the bowling-green, which the girls had taken possession of for their croquet-ground—a wonderful enclosure surrounded by high hedges of holly, three hundred years old and more; on the other, the ruins. Both were black as night; but before we got so far, there was a little opening in which we could just discern the trees and the lighter line of the road. I thought it best to pause there and take breath. "Bagley," I said, "there is something about these ruins I don't understand. It is there I am going. Keep your eyes open and your wits about you. Be ready to pounce upon any stranger you see—anything, man or woman. Don't hurt, but seize—anything you see." "Colonel," said Bagley, with a little tremor in his breath, "they do say there's things there—as is neither man nor woman." There was no time for words. "Are you game to follow me, my man? that's the question," I said. Bagley fell in without a word, and saluted. I knew then I had nothing to fear.

We went, so far as I could guess, exactly as I had come, when I heard that sigh. The darkness, however, was so complete that all marks, as of trees or paths, disappeared. One moment we felt our feet on the gravel, another sinking noiselessly into the slippery grass, that was all. I had shut up my lantern, not wishing to scare any one, whoever it might be. Bagley followed, it seemed to me, exactly in my footsteps as I made my way, as I supposed, towards the mass of the ruined house. We seemed to take a long time groping along seeking this; the squash of the wet soil under our feet was the only thing that marked our progress. After a while I stood still to see, or rather feel, where we were. The darkness was very still, but no stiller than is usual in a winter's night. The sounds I have mentioned—the crackling of twigs, the roll of a pebble, the sound of some rustle in the dead leaves, or creeping creature on the grass—were audible when you listened, all mysterious enough when your mind is disengaged, but to me cheering now as the signs of the livingness of nature, even in the death of the frost. As we stood still there came up from the trees in the glen the prolonged hoot of an owl. Bagley started with alarm, being in a state of general nervousness, and not knowing what he was afraid of. But to me the sound was encouraging and pleasant, being so comprehensible. "An owl," I said, under my breath. "Y—es, Colonel," said Bagley, his teeth chattering. We stood still about five minutes, while it broke into the still brooding of the air, the sound widening out in circles, dying upon the darkness. This sound, which is not a cheerful one, made me almost gay. It was natural, and relieved the tension of the mind. I moved on with new courage, my nervous excitement calming down.

When all at once, quite suddenly, close to us, at our feet, there broke out a cry. I made a spring backwards in the first moment of surprise and horror, and in doing so came sharply against the same rough masonry and brambles that had struck me before. This new sound came upwards from the ground—a low,

moaning, wailing voice, full of suffering and pain. The contrast between it and the hoot of the owl was indescribable; the one with a wholesome wildness and naturalness that hurt nobody—the other a sound that made one's blood curdle, full of human misery. With a great deal of fumbling—for in spite of everything I could do to keep up my courage my hands shook—I managed to remove the slide of my lantern. The light leaped out like something living, and made the place visible in a moment. We were what would have been inside the ruined building had anything remained but the gable-wall which I have described. It was close to us, the vacant doorway in it going out straight into the blackness outside. The light showed the bit of wall, the ivy glistening upon it in clouds of dark green, the bramble-branches waving, and below, the open door—a door that led to nothing. It was from this the voice came which died out just as the light flashed upon this strange scene. There was a moment's silence, and then it broke forth again. The sound was so near, so penetrating, so pitiful, that, on the nervous start I gave, the light fell out of my hand. As I groped for it in the dark my hand was clutched by Bagley, who I think must have dropped upon his knees; but I was too much perturbed myself to think much of this. He clutched at me in the confusion of his terror, forgetting all his usual decorum. "For God's sake, what is it, sir?" he gasped. If I yielded, there was evidently an end of both of us. "I can't tell," I said, "any more than you; that's what we've got to find out: up, man, up!" I pulled him to his feet. "Will you go round and examine the other side, or will you stay here with the lantern?" Bagley gasped at me with a face of horror. "Can't we stay together, Colonel?" he said—his knees were trembling under him. I pushed him against the corner of the wall, and put the light into his hands. "Stand fast till I come back; shake yourself together, man; let nothing pass you," I said. The voice was within two or three feet of us, of that there could be no doubt.

I went myself to the other side of the wall, keeping close to it. The light shook in Bagley's hand, but tremulous though it was, shone out through the vacant door, one oblong block of light marking all the crumbling corners and hanging masses of foliage. Was that something dark huddled in a heap by the side of it? I pushed forward across the light in the doorway, and fell upon it with my hands; but it was only a juniper-bush growing close against the wall. Meanwhile, the sight of my figure crossing the doorway had brought Bagley's nervous excitement to a height: he flew at me, gripping my shoulder. "I've got him, Colonel! I've got him!" he cried, with a voice of sudden exultation. He thought it was a man, and was at once relieved. But at that moment the voice burst forth again between us, at our feet—more close to us than any separate being could be. He dropped off from me, and fell against the wall, his jaw dropping as if he were dying. I suppose, at the same moment, he saw that it was me whom he had clutched. I, for my part, had scarcely more command of myself. I snatched the light out of his hand, and flashed it all about me wildly. Nothing—the juniper-bush which I thought I had never seen before, the heavy growth of the glistening ivy, the brambles waving. It was close to my ears now, crying, crying, pleading as if for life. Either I heard the same words Roland had heard, or else, in

my excitement, his imagination got possession of mine. The voice went on, growing into distinct articulation, but wavering about, now from one point, now from another, as if the owner of it were moving slowly back and forward—"Mother! mother!" and then an outburst of wailing. As my mind steadied, getting accustomed (as one's mind gets accustomed to anything), it seemed to me as if some uneasy, miserable creature was pacing up and down before a closed door. Sometimes—but that must have been excitement—I thought I heard a sound like knocking, and then another burst, "Oh, mother! mother!" All this close, close to the space where I was standing with my lantern—now before me, now behind me: a creature restless, unhappy, moaning, crying, before the vacant doorway, which no one could either shut or open more.

"Do you hear it, Bagley? do you hear what it is saying?" I cried, stepping in through the doorway. He was lying against the wall—his eyes glazed, half dead with terror. He made a motion of his lips as if to answer me, but no sounds came; then lifted his hand with a curious imperative movement as if ordering me to be silent and listen. And how long I did so I cannot tell. It began to have an interest, an exciting hold upon me, which I could not describe. It seemed to call up visibly a scene any one could understand—a something shut out, restlessly wandering to and fro; sometimes the voice dropped, as if throwing itself down—sometimes wandered off a few paces, growing sharp and clear. "Oh, mother, let me in! oh, mother, mother, let me in! oh, let me in!" every word was clear to me. No wonder the boy had gone wild with pity. I tried to steady my mind upon Roland, upon his conviction that I could do something, but my head swam with the excitement, even when I partially overcame the terror. At last the words died away, and there was a sound of sobs and moaning. I cried out, "In the name of God who are you?" with a kind of feeling in my mind that to use the name of God was profane, seeing that I did not believe in ghosts or anything supernatural; but I did all the same, and waited, my heart giving a leap of terror lest there should be a reply. Why this should have been I cannot tell, but I had a feeling that if there was an answer, it would be more than I could bear. But there was no answer; the moaning went on, and then, as if it had been real, the voice rose, a little higher again, the words recommenced, "Oh, mother, let me in! oh, mother, let me in!" with an expression that was heart-breaking to hear.

As if it had been real! What do I mean by that? I suppose I got less alarmed as the thing went on. I began to recover the use of my senses—I seemed to explain it all to myself by saying that this had once happened, that it was a recollection of a real scene. Why there should have seemed something quite satisfactory and composing in this explanation I cannot tell, but so it was. I began to listen almost as if it had been a play, forgetting Bagley, who, I almost think, had fainted, leaning against the wall. I was startled out of this strange spectatorship that had fallen upon me by the sudden rush of something which made my heart jump once more, a large black figure in the doorway waving its arms. "Come in! come in! come in!" it shouted out hoarsely at the top of a deep bass voice, and then poor Bagley fell down senseless across the threshold. He was less sophisticated than I—he had not been able to bear it any longer. I took him for

something supernatural, as he took me, and it was some time before I awoke to the necessities of the moment. I remembered only after, that from the time I began to give my attention to the man, I heard the other voice no more. It was some time before I brought him to. It must have been a strange scene; the lantern making a luminous spot in the darkness, the man's white face lying on the black earth, I over him, doing what I could for him. Probably I should have been thought to be murdering him had any one seen us. When at last I succeeded in pouring a little brandy down his throat he sat up and looked about him wildly. "What's up?" he said; then recognizing me, tried to struggle to his feet with a faint "Beg your pardon, Colonel." I got him home as best I could, making him lean upon my arm. The great fellow was as weak as a child. Fortunately he did not for some time remember what had happened. From the time Bagley fell the voice had stopped, and all was still.

"You've got an epidemic in your house, Colonel," Simson said to me next morning. "What's the meaning of it all? Here's your butler raving about a voice. This will never do, you know; and so far as I can make out, you are in it too."

"Yes, I am in it, doctor. I thought I had better speak to you. Of course you are treating Roland all right—but the boy is not raving, he is as sane as you or me. It's all true."

"As sane as—I—or you. I never thought the boy insane. He's got cerebral excitement, fever. I don't know what you've got. There's something very queer about the look of your eyes."

"Come," said I, "you can't put us all to bed, you know. You had better listen and hear the symptoms in full."

The doctor shrugged his shoulders, but he listened to me patiently. He did not believe a word of the story, that was clear, but he heard it all from beginning to end. "My dear fellow," he said, "the boy told me just the same. It's an epidemic. When one person falls a victim to this sort of thing, it's as safe as can be—there's always two or three."

"Then how do you account for it?" I said.

"Oh, account for it!—that's a different matter; there's no accounting for the freaks our brains are subject to. If it's delusion; if it's some trick of the echoes or the winds—some phonetic disturbance or other—"

"Come with me to-night, and judge for yourself," I said.

Upon this he laughed aloud, then said, "That's not such a bad idea; but it would ruin me for ever if it were known that John Simson was ghost-hunting."

"There it is," said I; "you dart down on us who are unlearned with your phonetic disturbances, but you daren't examine what the thing really is for fear of being laughed at. That's science!"

"It's not science—it's common-sense," said the doctor. "The thing has delusion on the front of it. It is encouraging an unwholesome tendency even to examine. What good could come of it? Even if I am convinced, I shouldn't believe."

"I should have said so yesterday; and I don't want you to be convinced or to believe," said I. "If you prove it to be a delusion, I shall be very much obliged to you for one. Come; somebody must go with me."

"You are cool," said the doctor. "You've disabled this poor fellow of yours, and made him—on that point—a lunatic for life; and now you want to disable me. But for once, I'll do it. To save appearance, if you'll give me a bed, I'll come over after my last rounds."

It was agreed that I should meet him at the gate, and that we should visit the scene of last night's occurrences before we came to the house, so that nobody might be the wiser. It was scarcely possible to hope that the cause of Bagley's sudden illness should not somehow steal into the knowledge of the servants at least, and it was better that all should be done as quietly as possible. The day seemed to me a very long one. I had to spend a certain part of it with Roland, which was a terrible ordeal for me—for what could I say to the boy? The improvement continued, but he was still in a very precarious state, and the trembling vehemence with which he turned to me when his mother left the room filled me with alarm. "Father!" he said, quietly. "Yes, my boy; I am giving my best attention to it—all is being done that I can do. I have not come to any conclusion—yet. I am neglecting nothing you said," I cried. What I could not do was to give his active mind any encouragement to dwell upon the mystery. It was a hard predicament, for some satisfaction had to be given him. He looked at me very wistfully, with the great blue eyes which shone so large and brilliant out of his white and worn face. "You must trust me," I said. "Yes, father. Father understands," he said to himself, as if to soothe some inward doubt. I left him as soon as I could. He was about the most precious thing I had on earth, and his health my first thought; but yet somehow, in the excitement of this other subject, I put that aside, and preferred not to dwell upon Roland, which was the most curious part of it all.

That night at eleven I met Simson at the gate. He had come by train, and I let him in gently myself. I had been so much absorbed in the coming experiment that I passed the ruins in going to meet him, almost without thought, if you can understand that. I had my lantern; and he showed me a coil of taper which he had ready for use. "There is nothing like light," he said, in his scoffing tone. It was a very still night, scarcely a sound, but not so dark. We could keep the path without difficulty as we went along. As we approached the spot we could hear a low moaning, broken occasionally by a bitter cry. "Perhaps that is your voice," said the doctor; "I thought it must be something of the kind. That's a poor brute caught in some of these infernal traps of yours; you'll find it among the bushes somewhere." I said nothing. I felt no particular fear, but a triumphant satisfaction in what was to follow. I led him to the spot where Bagley and I had stood on the previous night. All was silent as a winter night could be—so silent that we heard far off the sound of the horses in the stables, the shutting of a window at the house. Simson lighted his taper and went peering about, poking into all the corners. We looked like two conspirators lying in wait for some unfortunate traveller; but not a sound broke the quiet. The moaning had stopped before we came up; a star or two shone over us in the sky, looking down as if surprised at our strange proceedings. Dr. Simson did nothing but utter subdued laughs under his breath. "I thought as much," he said. "It is just

the same with tables and all other kinds of ghostly apparatus; a sceptic's presence stops everything. When I am present nothing ever comes off. How long do you think it will be necessary to stay here? Oh, I don't complain; only, when *you* are satisfied, *I* am—quite."

I will not deny that I was disappointed beyond measure by this result. It made me look like a credulous fool. It gave the doctor such a pull over me as nothing else could. I should point all his morals for years to come, and his materialism, his scepticism, would be increased beyond endurance. "It seems, indeed," I said, "that there is to be no——" "Manifestation," he said, laughing; "that is what all the mediums say. No manifestations, in consequence of the presence of an unbeliever." His laugh sounded very uncomfortable to me in the silence; and it was now near midnight. But that laugh seemed the signal; before it died away the moaning we had heard before was resumed. It started from some distance off, and came towards us, nearer and nearer, like some one walking along and moaning to himself. There could be no idea now that it was a hare caught in a trap. The approach was slow, like that of a weak person, with little halts and pauses. We heard it coming along the grass straight towards the vacant doorway. Simson had been a little startled by the first sound. He said hastily, "That child has no business to be out so late." But he felt, as well as I, that this was no child's voice. As it came nearer, he grew silent, and, going to the doorway with his taper, stood looking out towards the sound. The taper being unprotected blew about in the night air, though there was scarcely any wind. I threw the light of my lantern steady and white across the same space. It was a blaze of light in the midst of the blackness. A little icy thrill had gone over me at the first sound, but as it came close, I confess that my only feeling was satisfaction. The scoffer could scoff no more. The light touched his own face, and showed a very perplexed countenance. If he was afraid, he concealed it with great success, but he was perplexed. And then all that had happened on the previous night was enacted once more. It fell strangely upon me with a sense of repetition. Every cry, every sob seemed the same as before. I listened almost without any emotion at all in my own person, thinking of its effect upon Simson. He maintained a very bold front on the whole. All that coming and going of the voice, if our ears could be trusted, exactly in front of the vacant, blank doorway, blazing full of light, which caught and shone in the glistening leaves of the great hollies at a little distance. Not a rabbit could have crossed the turf without being seen; but there was nothing. After a time, Simson, with a certain caution and bodily reluctance, as it seemed to me, went out with his roll of taper into this space. His figure showed against the holly in full outline. Just at this moment the voice sank, as was its custom, and seemed to fling itself down at the door. Simson recoiled violently, as if some one had come up against him, then turned, and held his taper low as if examining something. "Do you see anybody?" I cried in a whisper, feeling the chill of nervous panic steal over me at this action. "It's nothing but a —— confounded juniper-bush," he said. This I knew very well to be nonsense, for the juniper-bush was on the other side. He went about after this round and round, poking his taper everywhere, then returned to me on the

inner side of the wall. He scoffed no longer; his face was contracted and pale. "How long does this go on?" he whispered to me, like a man who does not wish to interrupt some one who is speaking. I had become too much perturbed myself to remark whether the successions and changes of the voice were the same as last night. It suddenly went out in the air almost as he was speaking, with a soft, reiterated sob dying away. If there had been anything to be seen, I should have said that the person was at that moment crouching on the ground close to the door.

We walked home very silent afterwards. It was only when we were in sight of the house that I said, "What do you think of it?" "I can't tell you what to think of it," he said quickly. He took—though he was a very temperate man—not the claret I was going to offer him, but some brandy from the tray, and swallowed it almost undiluted. "Mind you, I don't believe a word of it," he said, when he had lighted his candle; "but I can't tell what to think," he turned round to add, when he was half-way upstairs.

All of this, however, did me no good with the solution of my problem. I was to help this weeping, sobbing thing, which was already to me as distinct a personality as anything I knew—or what should I say to Roland? It was on my heart that my boy would die if I could not find some way of helping this creature. You may be surprised that I should speak of it in this way. I did not know if it was man or woman; but I no more doubted that it was a soul in pain than I doubted my own being; and it was my business to soothe this pain—to deliver it, if that was possible. Was ever such a task given to an anxious father trembling for his only boy? I felt in my heart, fantastic as it may appear, that I must fulfil this somehow, or part with my child; and you may conceive that rather than do that I was ready to die. But even my dying would not have advanced me—unless by bringing me into the same world with that seeker at the door.

Next morning Simson was out before breakfast, and came in with evident signs of the damp grass on his boots, and a look of worry and weariness, which did not say much for the night he had passed. He improved a little after breakfast, and visited his two patients, for Bagley was still an invalid. I went out with him on his way to the train, to hear what he had to say about the boy. "He is going on very well," he said; "there are no complications as yet. But mind you, that's not a boy to be trifled with, Mortimer. Not a word to him about last night." I had to tell him then of my last interview with Roland, and of the impossible demand he had made upon me—by which, though he tried to laugh, he was much discomposed, as I could see. "We must just perjure ourselves all round," he said, "and swear you exorcised it"; but the man was too kind-hearted to be satisfied with that. "It's frightfully serious for you, Mortimer. I can't laugh as I should like to. I wish I saw a way out of it, for your sake. By the way," he added shortly, "didn't you notice that juniper-bush on the left-hand side?" "There was one on the right-hand side of the door. I noticed you made that mistake last night." "Mistake!" he cried, with a curious low laugh, pulling up the collar of his coat as though he felt the cold—"there's no juniper there this

morning, left or right. Just go and see." As he stepped into the train a few minutes after, he looked back upon me and beckoned me for a parting word. "I'm coming back to-night," he said.

I don't think I had any feeling about this as I turned away from that common bustle of the railway, which made my private preoccupations feel so strangely out of date. There had been a distinct satisfaction in my mind before that his scepticism had been so entirely defeated. But the more serious part of the matter pressed upon me now. I went straight from the railway to the manse, which stood on a little plateau on the side of the river opposite to the woods of Brentwood. The minister was one of a class which is not so common in Scotland as it used to be. He was a man of good family, well educated in the Scotch way, strong in philosophy, not so strong in Greek, strongest of all in experience—a man who had "come across," in the course of his life, most people of note that had ever been in Scotland—and who was said to be very sound in doctrine, without infringing the toleration with which old men, who are good men, are generally endowed. He was old-fashioned; perhaps he did not think so much about the troublous problems of theology as many of the young men, nor ask himself any hard questions about the Confession of Faith—but he understood human nature, which is perhaps better. He received me with a cordial welcome. "Come away, Colonel Mortimer," he said; "I'm all the more glad to see you, that I feel it's a good sign for the boy. He's doing well?—God be praised—and the Lord bless him and keep him. He has many a poor body's prayers—and that can do nobody harm."

"He will need them all, Dr. Moncrieff," I said, "and your counsel too." And I told him the story—more than I had told Simson. The old clergyman listened to me with many suppressed exclamations, and at the end the water stood in his eyes.

"That's just beautiful," he said. "I do not mind to have heard anything like it; it's as fine as Burns when he wished deliverance to one—that is prayed for in no kirk. Ay, ay! so he would have you console the poor lost spirit? God bless the boy! There's something more than common in that, Colonel Mortimer. And also the faith of him in his father!—I would like to put that into a sermon." Then the old gentleman gave me an alarmed look, and said, "No, no; I was not meaning a sermon; but I must write it down for the *Children's Record*." I saw the thought that passed through his mind. Either he thought, or he feared I would think, of a funeral sermon. You may believe this did not make me more cheerful.

I can scarcely say that Dr. Moncrieff gave me any advice. How could any one advise on such a subject? But he said, "I think I'll come too. I'm an old man; I'm less liable to be frighted than those that are further off the world unseen. It behooves me to think of my own journey there. I've no cut-and-dry beliefs on the subject. I'll come too; and maybe at the moment the Lord will put into our heads what to do."

This gave me a little comfort—more than Simson had given me. To be clear about the cause of it was not my grand desire. It was another thing that was in

my mind—my boy. As for the poor soul at the open door, I had no more doubt, as I have said, of its existence than I had of my own. It was no ghost to me. I knew the creature, and it was in trouble. That was my feeling about it, as it was Roland's. To hear it first was a great shock to my nerves, but not now; a man will get accustomed to anything. But to do something for it was the great problem; how was I to be serviceable to a being that was invisible, that was mortal no longer? "Maybe at the moment the Lord will put it into our heads." This is very old-fashioned phraseology, and a week before, most likely, I should have smiled (though always with kindness) at Dr. Moncrieff's credulity; but there was a great comfort, whether rational or otherwise I cannot say, in the mere sound of the words.

The road to the station and the village lay through the glen—not by the ruins; but though the sunshine and the fresh air, and the beauty of the trees, and the sound of the water were all very soothing to the spirits, my mind was so full of my own subject that I could not refrain from turning to the right hand as I got to the top of the glen, and going straight to the place which I may call the scene of all my thoughts. It was lying full in the sunshine, like all the rest of the world. The ruined gable looked due east, and in the present aspect of the sun the light streamed down through the doorway as our lantern had done, throwing a flood of light upon the damp grass beyond. There was a strange suggestion in the open door—so futile, a kind of emblem of vanity—all free around, so that you could go where you pleased, and yet that semblance of an enclosure—that way of entrance, unnecessary, leading to nothing. And why any creature should pray and weep to get in—to nothing: or be kept out—by nothing! You could not dwell upon it, or it made your brain go round. I remembered, however, what Simson said about the juniper, with a little smile on my own mind as to the inaccuracy of recollection, which even a scientific man will be guilty of. I could see now the light of my lantern gleaming upon the wet glistening surface of the spiky leaves at the right hand—and he ready to go to the stake for it that it was the left! I went round to make sure. And then I saw what he had said. Right or left there was no juniper at all. I was confounded by this, though it was entirely a matter of detail: nothing at all: a bush of brambles waving, the grass growing up to the very walls. But after all, though it gave me a shock for a moment, what did that matter? There were marks as if a number of footsteps had been up and down in front of the door; but these might have been our steps; and all was bright, and peaceful, and still. I poked about the other ruin—the larger ruins of the old house—for some time, as I had done before. There were marks upon the grass here and there, I could not call them footsteps, all about; but that told for nothing one way or another. I had examined the ruined rooms closely the first day. They were half filled up with soil and *débris*, withered brackens and bramble—no refuge for any one there. It vexed me that Jarvis should see me coming from that spot when he came up to me for his orders. I don't know whether my nocturnal expeditions had got wind among the servants. But there was a significant look in his face. Something in it I felt was like my own sensation when Simson in the midst of his scepticism was struck dumb. Jarvis felt satisfied

that his veracity had been put beyond question. I never spoke to a servant of mine in such a peremptory tone before. I sent him away "with a flea in his lug," as the man described it afterwards. Interference of any kind was intolerable to me at such a moment.

But what was strangest of all was, that I could not face Roland. I did not go up to his room as I would have naturally done at once. This the girls could not understand. They saw there was some mystery in it. "Mother has gone to lie down," Agatha said; "he has had such a good night." "But he wants you so, papa!" cried little Jeanie, always with her two arms embracing mine in a pretty way she had. I was obliged to go at last—but what could I say? I could only kiss him, and tell him to keep still—that I was doing all I could. There is something mystical about the patience of a child. "It will come all right, won't it, father?" he said. "God grant it may! I hope so, Roland." "Oh yes, it will come all right." Perhaps he understood that in the midst of my anxiety I could not stay with him as I should have done otherwise. But the girls were more surprised than it is possible to describe. They looked at me with wondering eyes. "If I were ill, papa, and you only stayed with me a moment, I should break my heart," said Agatha. But the boy had a sympathetic feeling. He knew that of my own will I would not have done it. I shut myself up in the library, where I could not rest, but kept pacing up and down like a caged beast. What could I do? and if I could do nothing, what would become of my boy? These were the questions that, without ceasing, pursued each other through my mind.

Simson came out to dinner, and when the house was all still, and most of the servants in bed, we went out and met Dr. Moncrieff, as we had appointed, at the head of the glen. Simson, for his part, was disposed to scoff at the doctor. "If there are to be any spells, you know, I'll cut the whole concern," he said. I did not make him any reply. I had not invited him; he could go or come as he pleased. He was very talkative, far more than suited my humour, as we went on. "One thing is certain, you know, there must be some human agency," he said. "It is all bosh about apparitions. I never have investigated the laws of sound to any great extent, and there's a great deal in ventriloquism that we don't know much about." "If it's the same to you," I said, "I wish you'd keep all that to yourself, Simson. It doesn't suit my state of mind." "Oh, I hope I know how to respect idiosyncrasy," he said. The very tone of his voice irritated me beyond measure. These scientific fellows, I wonder people put up with them as they do, when you have no mind for their cold-blooded confidence. Dr. Moncrieff met us about eleven o'clock, the same time as on the previous night. He was a large man, with a venerable countenance and white hair—old, but in full vigour, and thinking less of a cold night walk than many a younger man. He had his lantern as I had. We were fully provided with means of lighting the place, and we were all of us resolute men. We had a rapid consultation as we went up, and the result was that we divided to different posts. Dr. Moncrieff remained inside the wall—if you can call that inside where there was no wall but one. Simson placed himself on the side next the ruins, so as to intercept any communication with the old house, which was what his mind was fixed upon. I was posted on the

other side. To say that nothing could come near without being seen was self-evident. It had been so also on the previous night. Now, with our three lights in the midst of the darkness, the whole place seemed illuminated. Dr. Moncrieff's lantern, which was a large one, without any means of shutting up—an old-fashioned lantern with a pierced and ornamental top—shone steadily, the rays shooting out of it upward into the gloom. He placed it on the grass, where the middle of the room, if this had been a room, would have been. The usual effect of the light streaming out of the doorway was prevented by the illumination which Simson and I on either side supplied. With these differences, everything seemed as on the previous night.

And what occurred was exactly the same, with the same air of repetition, point for point, as I had formerly remarked. I declare that it seemed to me as if I were pushed against, put aside, by the owner of the voice as he paced up and down in his trouble—though these are perfectly futile words, seeing that the stream of light from my lantern, and that from Simson's taper, lay broad and clear, without a shadow, without the smallest break, across the entire breadth of the grass. I had ceased even to be alarmed, for my part. My heart was rent with pity and trouble—pity for the poor suffering human creature that moaned and pleaded so, and trouble for myself and my boy. God! if I could not find any help—and what help could I find?—Roland would die.

We were all perfectly still till the first outburst was exhausted, as I knew (by experience) it would be. Dr. Moncrieff, to whom it was new, was quite motionless on the other side of the wall, as we were in our places. My heart had remained almost at its usual beating during the voice. I was used to it; it did not rouse all my pulses as it did at first. But just as it threw itself sobbing at the door (I cannot use other words), there suddenly came something which sent the blood coursing through my veins and my heart into my mouth. It was a voice inside the wall—the minister's well-known voice. I would have been prepared for it in any kind of adjuration, but I was not prepared for what I heard. It came out with a sort of stammering, as if too much moved for utterance. "Willie, Willie! Oh, God preserve us! is it you?"

These simple words had an effect upon me that the voice of the invisible creature had ceased to have. I thought the old man, whom I had brought into this danger, had gone mad with terror. I made a dash round to the other side of the wall, half crazed myself with the thought. He was standing where I had left him, his shadow thrown vague and large upon the grass by the lantern which stood at his feet. I lifted my own light to see his face as I rushed forward. He was very pale, his eyes wet and glistening, his mouth quivering with parted lips. He neither saw nor heard me. We that had gone through this experience before, had crouched towards each other to get a little strength to bear it. But he was not even aware that I was there. His whole being seemed absorbed in anxiety and tenderness. He held out his hands, which trembled, but it seemed to me with eagerness, not fear. He went on speaking all the time. "Willie, if it is you—and it's you, if it is not a delusion of Satan—Willie, lad! why come ye here frighting them that know you not? Why came ye not to me?"

He seemed to wait for an answer. When his voice ceased, his countenance, every line moving, continued to speak. Simson gave me another terrible shock, stealing into the open doorway with his light, as much awe-stricken, as wildly curious, as I. But the minister resumed, without seeing Simson, speaking to some one else. His voice took a tone of expostulation——

"Is this right to come here? Your mother's gone with your name on her lips. Do you think she would ever close her door on her own lad? Do ye think the Lord will close the door, ye faint-hearted creature? No!—I forbid ye! I forbid ye!" cried the old man. The sobbing voice had begun to resume its cries. He made a step forward, calling out the last words in a voice of command. "I forbid ye! Cry out no more to man. Go home, ye wandering spirit! go home! Do you hear me?—me that christened ye, that have struggled with ye, that have wrestled for ye with the Lord!" Here the loud tones of his voice sank into tenderness. "And her too, poor woman! poor woman! her you are calling upon. She's no here. You'll find her with the Lord. Go there and seek her, not here. Do you hear me, lad? go after her there. He'll let you in, though it's late. Man, take heart! if you will lie and sob and greet, let it be at heaven's gate, and no your poor mother's ruined door."

He stopped to get his breath: and the voice had stopped, not as it had done before, when its time was exhausted and all its repetitions said, but with a sobbing catch in the breath as if overruled. Then the minister spoke again, "Are you hearing me, Will? Oh, laddie, you've liked the beggarly elements all your days. Be done with them now. Go home to the Father—the Father! Are you hearing me?" Here the old man sank down upon his knees, his face raised upwards, his hands held up with a tremble in them, all white in the light in the midst of the darkness. I resisted as long as I could, though I cannot tell why—then I, too, dropped upon my knees. Simson all the time stood in the doorway, with an expression in his face such as words could not tell, his under lip drooped, his eyes wild, staring. It seemed to be to him, that image of blank ignorance and wonder, that we were praying. All the time the voice, with a low arrested sobbing, lay just where he was standing, as I thought.

"Lord," the minister said—"Lord, take him into Thy everlasting habitations. The mother he cries to is with Thee. Who can open to him but Thee? Lord, when is it too late for Thee, or what is too hard for Thee? Lord, let that woman there draw him inower! Let her draw him inower!"

I sprang forward to catch something in my arms that flung itself wildly within the door. The illusion was so strong, that I never paused till I felt my forehead graze against the wall and my hands clutch the ground—for there was nobody there to save from falling, as in my foolishness I thought. Simson held out his hand to me to help me up. He was trembling and cold, his lower lip hanging, his speech almost inarticulate. "It's gone," he said, stammering—"it's gone!" We leant upon each other for a moment, trembling so much both of us that the whole scene trembled as if it were going to dissolve and disappear; and yet as long as I live I will never forget it—the shining of the strange lights, the blackness all round, the kneeling figure with all the whiteness of the light concen-

trated on its white venerable head and uplifted hands. A strange solemn stillness seemed to close all round us. By intervals a single syllable, "Lord! Lord!" came from the old minister's lips. He saw none of us, nor thought of us. I never knew how long we stood, like sentinels guarding him at his prayers, holding our lights in a confused dazed way, not knowing what we did. But at last he rose from his knees, and standing up at his full height, raised his arms, as the Scotch manner is at the end of a religious service, and solemnly gave the apostolical benediction—to what? to the silent earth, the dark woods, the wide breathing atmosphere—for we were but spectators gasping an Amen!

It seemed to me that it must be the middle of the night, as we all walked back. It was in reality very late. Dr. Moncrieff put his arm into mine. He walked slowly, with an air of exhaustion. It was as if we were coming from a deathbed. Something hushed and solemnized the very air. There was that sense of relief in it which there always is at the end of a death-struggle. And nature persistent, never daunted, came back in all of us, as we returned into the ways of life. We said nothing to each other, indeed, for a time; but when we got clear of the trees and reached the opening near the house, where we could see the sky, Dr. Moncrieff himself was the first to speak. "I must be going," he said; "it's very late, I'm afraid. I will go down the glen, as I came."

"But not alone. I am going with you, doctor."

"Well, I will not oppose it. I am an old man and agitation wearies more than work. Yes; I'll be thankful of your arm. To-night, Colonel, you've done me more good turns than one."

I pressed his hand on my arm, not feeling able to speak. But Simson, who turned with us, and who had gone along all this time with his taper flaring, in entire unconsciousness, came to himself, apparently at the sound of our voices, and put out that wild little torch with a quick movement, as if of shame. "Let me carry your lantern," he said; "it is heavy." He recovered with a spring, and in a moment, from the awe-stricken spectator he had been, became himself sceptical and cynical. "I should like to ask you a question," he said. "Do you believe in Purgatory, Doctor? It's not in the tenets of the Church, so far as I know."

"Sir," said Dr. Moncrieff, "an old man like me is sometimes not very sure what he believes. There is just one thing I am certain of—and that is the loving-kindness of God."

"But I thought that was in this life. I am no theologian—"

"Sir," said the old man, again with a tremor in him which I could feel going over all his frame, "if I saw a friend of mine within the gates of hell, I would not despair but his Father would take him by the hand still—if he cried like *yon*."

"I allow it is very strange—very strange. I cannot see through it. That there must be human agency, I feel sure. Doctor, what made you decide upon the person and the name?"

The minister put out his hand with the impatience which a man might show if he were asked how he recognized his brother. "Tuts!" he said, in familiar

speech—then more solemnly, "how should I not recognize a person that I know better—far better—than I know you?"

"Then you saw the man?"

Dr. Moncrieff made no reply. He moved his hand again with a little impatient movement, and walked on, leaning heavily on my arm. And we went on for a long time without another word, threading the dark paths, which were steep and slippery with the damp of the winter. The air was very still—not more than enough to make a faint sighing in the branches, which mingled with the sound of the water to which we were descending. When we spoke again, it was about indifferent matters—about the height of the river, and the recent rains. We parted with the minister at his own door, where his old housekeeper appeared in great perturbation, waiting for him. "Eh, me, minister! the young gentleman will be worse?" she cried.

"Far from that—better. God bless him!" Doctor Moncrieff said.

I think if Simson had begun again to me with his questions, I should have pitched him over the rocks as we returned up the glen; but he was silent, by a good inspiration. And the sky was clearer than it had been for many nights, shining high over the trees, with here and there a star faintly gleaming through the wilderness of dark and bare branches. The air, as I have said, was very soft in them, with a subdued and peaceful cadence. It was real, like every natural sound, and came to us like a hush of peace and relief. I thought there was a sound in it as of the breath of a sleeper, and it seemed clear to me that Roland must be sleeping, satisfied and calm. We went up to his room when we went in. There we found the complete hush of rest. My wife looked up out of a doze, and gave me a smile; "I think he is a great deal better: but you are very late," she said in a whisper, shading the light with her hand that the doctor might see his patient. The boy had got back something like his own colour. He woke as we stood all round his bed. His eyes had the happy half-awakened look of childhood, glad to shut again, yet pleased with the interruption and glimmer of the light. I stooped over him and kissed his forehead, which was moist and cool. "All is well, Roland," I said. He looked up at me with a glance of pleasure, and took my hand and laid his cheek upon it, and so went to sleep.

For some nights after, I watched among the ruins, spending all the dark hours up to midnight patrolling about the bit of wall which was associated with so many emotions; but I heard nothing, and saw nothing beyond the quiet course of nature: nor, so far as I am aware, has anything been heard again. Dr. Moncrieff gave me the history of the youth, whom he never hesitated to name. I did not ask, as Simson did, how he recognized him. He had been a prodigal—weak, foolish, easily imposed upon, and "led away," as people say. All that we had heard had passed actually in life, the doctor said. The young man had come home thus a day or two after his mother died—who was no more than the housekeeper in the old house—and distracted with the news, had thrown himself down at the door and called upon her to let him in. The old man could scarcely speak of it for tears. To me it seemed as if—heaven help us, how little

do we know about anything!—a scene like that might impress itself somehow upon the hidden heart of nature. I do not pretend to know how, but the repetition had struck me at the time as, in its terrible strangeness and incomprehensibility, almost mechanical—as if the unseen actor could not exceed or vary, but was bound to re-enact the whole. One thing that struck me, however, greatly, was the likeness between the old minister and my boy in the manner of regarding these strange phenomena. Dr. Moncrieff was not terrified, as I had been myself, and all the rest of us. It was no "ghost," as I fear we all vulgarly considered it, to him—but a poor creature whom he knew under these conditions, just as he had known him in the flesh, having no doubt of his identity. And to Roland it was the same. This spirit in pain—if it was a spirit—this voice out of the unseen—was a poor fellow-creature in misery, to be succoured and helped out of his trouble, to my boy. He spoke to me quite frankly about it when he got better. "I knew father would find out some way," he said. And this was when he was strong and well, and all idea that he would turn hysterical or become a seer of visions had happily passed away.

I must add one curious fact which does not seem to me to have any relation to the above, but which Simson made great use of, as the human agency which he was determined to find somehow. We had examined the ruins very closely at the time of these occurrences; but afterwards, when all was over, as we went casually about them one Sunday afternoon in the idleness of that unemployed day, Simson with his stick penetrated an old window which had been entirely blocked up with fallen soil. He jumped down into it in great excitement, and called me to follow. There we found a little hole—for it was more a hole than a room—entirely hidden under the ivy ruins, in which there was a quantity of straw laid in a corner, as if some one had made a bed there, and some remains of crusts about the floor. Some one had lodged there, and not very long before, he made out; and that this unknown being was the author of all the mysterious sounds we heard he is convinced. "I told you it was human agency," he said, triumphantly. He forgets, I suppose, how he and I stood with our lights seeing nothing, while the space between us was audibly traversed by something that could speak, and sob, and suffer. There is no argument with men of this kind. He is ready to get up a laugh against me on this slender ground. "I was puzzled myself—I could not make it out—but I always felt convinced human agency was at the bottom of it. And here it is—and a clever fellow he must have been," the doctor says.

Bagley left my service as soon as he got well. He assured me it was no want of respect; but he could not stand "them kind of things," and the man was so shaken and ghastly that I was glad to give him a present and let him go. For my own part, I made a point of staying out the time, two years, for which I had taken Brentwood; but I did not renew my tenancy. By that time we had settled, and found for ourselves a pleasant home of our own.

I must add that when the doctor defies me, I can always bring back gravity to his countenance, and a pause in his railing, when I remind him of the juniper-

bush. To me that was a matter of little importance. I could believe I was mistaken. I did not care about it one way or other; but on his mind the effect was different. The miserable voice, the spirit in pain, he could think of as the result of ventriloquism, or reverberation, or—anything you please: an elaborate prolonged hoax executed somehow by the tramp that had found a lodging in the old tower. But the juniper-bush staggered him. Things have effects so different on the minds of different men.

Charles Dickens

THE STORY OF THE BAGMAN'S UNCLE

from The Posthumous Papers of The Pickwick Club

Chapman & Hall, 1837

My uncle, gentlemen," said the bagman, "was one of the merriest, pleasantest, cleverest fellows that ever lived. I wish you had known him, gentlemen. On second thoughts, gentlemen, I *don't* wish you had known him, for if you had, you would have been all, by this time, in the ordinary course of nature, if not dead, at all events so near it as to have taken to stopping at home and giving up company: which would have deprived me of the inestimable pleasure of addressing you at this moment. Gentlemen, I wish your fathers and mothers had known my uncle. They would have been amazingly fond of him, especially your respectable mothers; I know they would. If any two of his numerous virtues predominated over the many that adorned his character, I should say they were his mixed punch, and his after-supper song. Excuse my dwelling on these melancholy recollections of departed worth; you won't see a man like my uncle every day in the week.

"I have always considered it a great point in my uncle's character, gentlemen, that he was the intimate friend and companion of Tom Smart, of the great house of Bilson and Slum, Cateaton Street, City. My uncle collected for Tiggin and Welps, but for a long time he went pretty near the same journey as Tom; and the very first night they met, my uncle took a fancy for Tom, and Tom took a fancy for my uncle. They made a bet of a new hat, before they had known each other half an hour, who should brew the best quart of punch and drink it the quickest. My uncle was judged to have won the making, but Tom Smart beat him in the drinking by about half a salt-spoonful. They took another quart apiece to drink each other's health in, and were staunch friends ever afterwards. There's a destiny in these things, gentlemen; we can't help it.

"In personal appearance, my uncle was a trifle shorter than the middle size;

he was a thought stouter, too, than the ordinary run of people, and perhaps his face might be a shade redder. He had the jolliest face you ever saw, gentlemen: something like Punch, with a handsomer nose and chin; his eyes were always twinkling and sparkling with good-humour; and a smile—not one of your unmeaning, wooden grins, but a real merry, hearty, good-tempered smile—was perpetually on his countenance. He was pitched out of his gig once, and knocked, head first, against a milestone. There he lay, stunned, and so cut about the face with some gravel which had been heaped up alongside it, that, to use my uncle's own strong expression, if his mother could have revisited the earth, she wouldn't have known him. Indeed, when I come to think of the matter, gentlemen, I feel pretty sure she wouldn't, for she died when my uncle was two years and seven months old, and I think it's very likely that, even without the gravel, his top-boots would have puzzled the good lady not a little: to say nothing of his jolly red face. However, there he lay, and I have heard my uncle say, many a time, that the man said who picked him up that he was smiling as merrily as if he had tumbled out for a treat, and that after they had bled him, the first faint glimmerings of returning animation were, his jumping up in bed, bursting out into a loud laugh, kissing the young woman who held the basin, and demanding a mutton chop and a pickled walnut instantly. He was very fond of pickled walnuts, gentlemen. He said he always found that, taken without vinegar, they relished the beer.

"My uncle's great journey was in the fall of the leaf, at which time he collected debts, and took orders, in the north: going from London to Edinburgh, from Edinburgh to Glasgow, from Glasgow back to Edinburgh, and thence to London by the smack. You are to understand that his second visit to Edinburgh was for his own pleasure. He used to go back for a week, just to look up his old friends; and what with breakfasting with this one, lunching with that, dining with a third, and supping with another, a pretty tight week he used to make of it. I don't know whether any of you gentlemen, ever partook of a real substantial hospitable Scotch breakfast, and then went out to a slight lunch of a bushel of oysters, a dozen or so of bottled ale, and a noggin or two of whiskey to close up with. If you ever did, you will agree with me that it requires a pretty strong head to go out to dinner and supper afterwards.

"But bless your hearts and eyebrows, all this sort of thing was nothing to my uncle! He was so well seasoned, that it was mere child's play. I have heard him say that he could see the Dundee people out any day, and walk home afterwards without staggering; and yet the Dundee people have as strong heads and as strong punch, gentlemen, as you are likely to meet with between the poles. I have heard of a Glasgow man and a Dundee man drinking against each other for fifteen hours at a sitting. They were both suffocated, as nearly as could be ascertained, at the same moment, but with this trifling exception, gentlemen, they were not a bit the worse for it.

"One night, within four-and-twenty hours of the time when he had settled to take shipping for London, my uncle supped at the house of a very old friend of his, a Baillie Mac something, and four syllables after it, who lived in the old

town of Edinburgh. There were the baillie's wife and the baillie's three daughters, and the baillie's grown-up son, and three or four stout, bushy-eyebrowed, canty old Scotch fellows, that the baillie had got together to do honour to my uncle, and help to make merry. It was a glorious supper. There were kippered salmon, and Finnan haddocks, and a lamb's head, and a haggis—a celebrated Scotch dish, gentlemen, which my uncle used to say always looked to him, when it came to table, very much like a cupid's stomach—and a great many other things besides, that I forget the names of, but very good things notwithstanding. The lassies were pretty and agreeable; the baillie's wife, one of the best creatures that ever lived; and my uncle in thoroughly good cue: the consequence of which was, that the young ladies tittered and giggled, and the old lady laughed out loud, and the baillie and the other old fellows roared till they were red in the face, the whole mortal time. I don't quite recollect how many tumblers of whiskey toddy each man drank after supper; but this I know, that about one o'clock in the morning, the baillie's grown-up son became insensible while attempting the first verse of 'Willie brewed a peck o' maut'; and he having been, for half an hour before, the only other man visible above the mahogany, it occurred to my uncle that it was almost time to think about going: especially as drinking had set in at seven o'clock, in order that he might get home at a decent hour. But, thinking it might not be quite polite to go just then, my uncle voted himself into the chair, mixed another glass, rose to propose his own health, addressed himself in a neat and complimentary speech, and drank the toast with great enthusiasm. Still nobody woke; so my uncle took a little drop more—neat this time, to prevent the toddy disagreeing with him—and, laying violent hands on his hat, sallied forth into the street.

"It was a wild gusty night when my uncle closed the baillie's door, and setting his hat firmly on his head, to prevent the wind from taking it, thrust his hands into his pockets, and looking upwards, took a short survey of the state of the weather. The clouds were drifting over the moon at their giddiest speed: at one time wholly obscuring her: at another, suffering her to burst forth in full splendour and shed her light on all the objects around: anon, driving over her again with increased velocity, and shrouding everything in darkness. 'Really, this won't do,' said my uncle, addressing himself to the weather, as if he felt himself personally offended. 'This is not at all the kind of thing for my voyage. It will not do at any price,' said my uncle very impressively. Having repeated this several times, he recovered his balance with some difficulty—for he was rather giddy with looking up into the sky so long—and walked merrily on.

"The baillie's house was in the Canongate, and my uncle was going to the other end of Leith Walk, rather better than a mile's journey. On either side of him, there shot up against the dark sky, tall, gaunt, straggling houses, with time-stained fronts, and windows that seemed to have shared the lot of eyes in mortals, and to have grown dim and sunken with age. Six, seven, eight stories high, were the houses; story piled above story, as children build with cards—throwing their dark shadows over the roughly paved road, and making the dark night darker. A few oil lamps scattered at long distances, but they only served

to mark the dirty entrance to some narrow close, or to show where a common stair communicated, by steep and intricate windings, with the various flats above. Glancing at all these things with the air of a man who had seen them too often before to think them worthy of much notice now, my uncle walked up the middle of the street, with a thumb in each waistcoat pocket, indulging, from time to time, in various snatches of song, chanted forth with such good-will and spirit, that the quiet honest folk started from their first sleep, and lay trembling in bed till the sound died away in the distance; when, satisfying themselves that it was only some drunken ne'er-do-weel finding his way home, they covered themselves up warm and fell asleep again.

"I am particular in describing how my uncle walked up the middle of the street, with his thumbs in his waistcoat pockets, gentlemen, because, as he often used to say (and with great reason too), there is nothing at all extraordinary in this story, unless you distinctly understand at the beginning that he was not by any means of a marvellous or romantic turn.

"Gentlemen, my uncle walked on with his thumbs in his waistcoat pockets, taking the middle of the street to himself, and singing, now a verse of a love song, and then a verse of a drinking one, and when he was tired of both, whistling melodiously, until he reached the North Bridge, which, at this point, connects the old and new towns of Edinburgh. Here he stopped for a minute, to look at the strange irregular clusters of lights piled one above the other, and twinkling afar off, so high in the air, that they looked like stars, gleaming from the castle walls on the one side, and the Calton Hill on the other, as if they illuminated veritable castles in the air: while the old picturesque town slept heavily on, in gloom and darkness below: its palace and chapel of Holyrood, guarded day and night, as a friend of my uncle's used to say, by old Arthur's Seat, towering, surly and dark, like some gruff genius, over the ancient city he has watched so long. I say, gentlemen, my uncle stopped here, for a minute, to look about him; and then paying a compliment to the weather, which had a little cleared up, though the moon was sinking, walked on again, as royally as before: keeping the middle of the road with great dignity, and looking as if he should very much like to meet with somebody who would dispute possession of it with him. There was nobody at all disposed to contest the point, as it happened; and so, on he went, with his thumbs in his waistcoat pockets, like a lamb.

"When my uncle reached the end of Leith Walk, he had to cross a pretty large piece of waste ground, which separated him from a short street which he had to turn down, to go direct to his lodging. Now, in this piece of waste ground, there was, at that time, an enclosure belonging to some wheelwright, who contracted with the Post Office for the purchase of old worn-out mail-coaches; and my uncle, being very fond of coaches, old, young, or middle-aged, all at once took it into his head to step out of his road for no other purpose than to peep between the palings at these mails: about a dozen of which he remembered to have seen, crowded together in a very forlorn and dismantled state, inside. My uncle was a very enthusiastic, emphatic sort of person, gentlemen; so, finding that he could not obtain a good peep between the palings, he got over them, and

sitting himself quietly down on an old axletree, began to contemplate the mail-coaches with a deal of gravity.

"There might be a dozen of them, or there might be more—my uncle was never quite certain on this point, and being a man of very scrupulous veracity about numbers, didn't like to say—but there they stood, all huddled together in the most desolate condition imaginable. The doors had been torn from their hinges and removed; the linings had been stripped off: only a shred hanging here and there by a rusty nail; the lamps were gone, the poles had long since vanished, the iron-work was rusty, the paint worn away; the wind whistled through the chinks in the bare wood-work; and the rain which had collected on the roofs, fell, drop by drop, into the insides with a hollow and melancholy sound. They were the decaying skeletons of departed mails, and in that lonely place, at that time of night, they looked chill and dismal.

"My uncle rested his head upon his hands, and thought of the busy bustling people who had rattled about, years before, in the old coaches, and were now as silent and changed: he thought of the numbers of people to whom one of those crazy, mouldering vehicles had borne, night after night, for many years, and through all weathers, the anxiously expected intelligence, the eagerly looked-for remittance, the promised assurance of health and safety, the sudden announcement of sickness and death. The merchant, the lover, the wife, the widow, the mother, the schoolboy, the very child who tottered to the door at the postman's knock—how had they all looked forward to the arrival of the old coach! And where were they all now?

"Gentlemen, my uncle used to *say* that he thought all this at the time, but I rather suspect he learnt it out of some book afterwards, for he distinctly stated that he fell into a kind of doze as he sat on the old axletree looking at the decayed mail-coaches, and that he was suddenly awakened by some deep church bell striking two. Now, my uncle was never a fast thinker, and if he had thought all these things, I am quite certain it would have taken him till full half-past two o'clock, at the very least. I am, therefore, decidedly of opinion, gentlemen, that my uncle fell into the kind of doze, without having thought about anything at all.

"Be this as it may, a church bell struck two. My uncle woke, rubbed his eyes, and jumped up in astonishment.

"In one instant after the clock struck two, the whole of this deserted and quiet spot had become a scene of most extraordinary life and animation. The mail-coach doors were on their hinges, the lining was replaced, the iron-work was as good as new, the paint was restored, the lamps were alight, cushions and great-coats were on every coach-box, porters were thrusting parcels into every boot, guards were stowing away letter-bags, hostlers were dashing pails of water against the renovated wheels; numbers of men were rushing about, fixing poles into every coach; passengers arrived, portmanteaus were handed up, horses were put to; and, in short, it was perfectly clear that every mail there was to be off directly. Gentlemen, my uncle opened his eyes so wide at all this, that, to the

very last moment of his life, he used to wonder how it fell out that he had ever been able to shut 'em again.

"'Now then!' said a voice, as my uncle felt a hand on his shoulder. 'You're booked for one inside. You'd better get in.'

"'*I* booked!' said my uncle, turning round.

"'Yes, certainly.'

"My uncle, gentlemen, could say nothing; he was so very much astonished. The queerest thing of all was, that although there was such a crowd of persons, and although fresh faces were pouring in every moment, there was no telling where they came from; they seemed to start up, in some strange manner, from the ground or the air, and disappear in the same way. When a porter had put his luggage in the coach, and received his fare, he turned round and was gone; and before my uncle had well begun to wonder what had become of him, half-a-dozen fresh ones started up, and staggered along under the weight of parcels which seemed big enough to crush them. The passengers were all dressed so oddly too—large, broad-skirted, laced coats with great cuffs, and no collars; and wigs, gentlemen,—great formal wigs and a tie behind. My uncle could make nothing of it.

"'Now, *are* you going to get in?' said the person who had addressed my uncle before. He was dressed as a mail guard, with a wig on his head, and most enormous cuffs to his coat, and had a lantern in one hand, and a huge blunderbuss in the other, which he was going to stow away in his little arm-chest. '*Are* you going to get in, Jack Martin?' said the guard, holding the lantern to my uncle's face.

"'Hallo!' said my uncle, falling back a step or two. 'That's familiar!'

"'It's so on the way-bill,' replied the guard.

"'Isn't there a "Mister" before it?' said my uncle—for he felt, gentlemen, that for a guard he didn't know to call him Jack Martin, was a liberty which the Post Office wouldn't have sanctioned if they had known it.

"'No; there is not,' rejoined the guard coolly.

"'Is the fare paid?' inquired my uncle.

"'Of course it is,' rejoined the guard.

"'It is, is it?' said my uncle. 'Then here goes—which coach?'

"'This,' said the guard, pointing to an old-fashioned Edinburgh and London Mail, which had the steps down, and the door open. 'Stop—here are the other passengers. Let them get in first.'

"As the guard spoke, there all at once appeared, right in front of my uncle, a young gentleman in a powdered wig, and a sky-blue coat trimmed with silver, made very full and broad in the skirts, which were lined with buckram. Tiggin and Welps were in the printed calico and waistcoat-piece line, gentlemen, so my uncle knew all the materials at once. He wore knee breeches, and a kind of leggings rolled up over his silk stockings, and shoes with buckles; he had ruffles at his wrists, a three-cornered hat on his head, and a long taper sword by his side. The flaps of his waistcoat came half-way down his thighs, and the ends of his cravat reached to his waist. He stalked gravely to the coach door, pulled off his hat, and held it above his head at arm's length: cocking his little finger in the

air at the same time, as some affected people do when they take a cup of tea. Then he drew his feet together, and made a low grave bow, and then put out his left hand. My uncle was just going to step forward, and shake it heartily, when he perceived that these attentions were directed, not towards him, but to a young lady, who just then appeared at the foot of the steps, attired in an old-fashioned green velvet dress, with a long waist and stomacher. She had no bonnet on her head, gentlemen, which was muffled in a black silk hood, but she looked round for an instant as she prepared to get into the coach, and such a beautiful face as she discovered, my uncle had never seen—not even in a picture. She got into the coach, holding up her dress with one hand; and, as my uncle always said with a round oath, when he told the story, he wouldn't have believed it possible that legs and feet could have been brought to such a state of perfection, unless he had seen them with his own eyes.

"But, in this one glimpse of the beautiful face, my uncle saw that the young lady had cast an imploring look upon him, and that she appeared terrified and distressed. He noticed, too, that the young fellow in the powdered wig, notwithstanding his show of gallantry, which was all very fine and grand, clasped her tight by the wrist when she got in, and followed himself immediately afterwards. An uncommonly ill-looking fellow in a close brown wig and a plum-coloured suit, wearing a very large sword, and boots up to his hips, belonged to the party; and when he sat himself down next to the young lady, who shrunk into a corner at his approach, my uncle was confirmed in his original impression that something dark and mysterious was going forward, or, as he always said himself, that 'there was a screw loose somewhere.' It's quite surprising how quickly he made up his mind to help the lady at any peril, if she needed help.

" 'Death and lightning!' exclaimed the young gentleman, laying his hand upon his sword, as my uncle entered the coach.

" 'Blood and thunder!' roared the other gentleman. With this, he whipped his sword out, and made a lunge at my uncle without further ceremony. My uncle had no weapon about him, but with great dexterity he snatched the ill-looking gentleman's three-cornered hat from his head, and receiving the point of his sword right through the crown, squeezed the sides together, and held it tight.

" 'Pink him behind!' cried the ill-looking gentleman to his companion, as he struggled to regain his sword.

" 'He had better not,' cried my uncle, displaying the heel of one of his shoes in a threatening manner. 'I'll kick his brains out if he has any, or fracture his skull if he hasn't.' Exerting all his strength at this moment, my uncle wrenched the ill-looking man's sword from his grasp, and flung it clean out of the coach window; upon which the younger gentleman vociferated 'Death and lightning!' again, and laid his hand upon the hilt of his sword in a very fierce manner, but didn't draw it. Perhaps, gentlemen, as my uncle used to say, with a smile, perhaps he was afraid of alarming the lady.

" 'Now, gentlemen,' said my uncle, taking his seat deliberately, 'I don't want to have any death, with or without lightning, in a lady's presence, and we

have had quite blood and thundering enough for one journey; so, if you please, we'll sit in our places like quiet insides. Here, guard, pick up that gentleman's carving-knife.'

"As quickly as my uncle said the words, the guard appeared at the coach window, with the gentleman's sword in his hand. He held up his lantern and looked earnestly in my uncle's face, as he handed it in: when, by its light, my uncle saw, to his great surprise, that an immense crowd of mail-coach guards swarmed round the window, every one of whom had his eyes earnestly fixed upon him too. He had never seen such a sea of white faces, and red bodies, and earnest eyes, in all his born days.

" 'This is the strangest sort of thing I ever had anything to do with,' thought my uncle. 'Allow me to return you your hat, sir.'

"The ill-looking gentleman received his three-cornered hat in silence; looked at the hole in the middle with an enquiring air; and finally stuck it on the top of his wig, with a solemnity the effect of which was a trifle impaired by his sneezing violently at the moment, and jerking it off again.

" 'All right!' cried the guard with the lantern, mounting into his little seat behind. Away they went. My uncle peeped out of the coach window as they emerged from the yard, and observed that the other mails, with coachmen, guards, horses, and passengers, complete, were driving round and round in circles, at a slow trot of about five miles an hour. My uncle burnt with indignation, gentlemen. As a commercial man, he felt that the mail-bags were not to be trifled with, and he resolved to memorialise the Post Office on the subject, the very instant he reached London.

"At present, however, his thoughts were occupied with the young lady who sat in the farthest corner of the coach, with her face muffled closely in her hood: the gentleman with the sky-blue coat sitting opposite to her: and the other man in the plum-coloured suit at her side: and both watching her intently. If she so much as rustled the folds of her hood, he could hear the ill-looking man clap his hand upon his sword, and could tell by the other's breathing (it was so dark, he couldn't see his face) that he was looking as big as if he were going to devour her at a mouthful. This roused my uncle more and more, and he resolved, come what come might, to see the end of it. He had a great admiration for bright eyes, and sweet faces, and pretty legs and feet; in short, he was fond of the whole sex. It runs in our family, gentlemen—so am I.

"Many were the devices which my uncle practised to attract the lady's attention, or, at all events, to engage the mysterious gentleman in conversation. They were all in vain; the gentleman wouldn't talk, and the lady didn't dare. He thrust his head out of the coach window at intervals, and bawled out to know why they didn't go faster. But he called till he was hoarse—nobody paid the least attention to him. He leant back in the coach, and thought of the beautiful face, and the feet, and legs. This answered better; it whiled away the time, and kept him from wondering where he was going, and how it was he found himself in such an odd situation. Not that this would have worried him much, anyway—

he was a mighty free and easy, roving, devil-may-care sort of person, was my uncle, gentlemen.

"All of a sudden the coach stopped. 'Hallo!' said my uncle, 'what's in the wind now?'

" 'Alight here,' said the guard, letting down the steps.

" 'Here!' cried my uncle.

" 'Here,' rejoined the guard.

" 'I'll do nothing of the sort,' said my uncle.

" 'Very well, then stop where you are,' said the guard.

" 'I will,' said my uncle.

" 'Do,' said the guard.

"The other passengers had regarded this colloquy with great attention; and, finding that my uncle was determined not to alight, the younger man squeezed past him, to hand the lady out. At this moment, the ill-looking man was inspecting the hole in the crown of his three-cornered hat. As the young lady brushed past, she dropped one of her gloves into my uncle's hand, and softly whispered with her lips so close to his face, that he felt her warm breath on his nose, the single word 'Help.' Gentlemen, my uncle leaped out of the coach at once, with such violence that it rocked on the springs again.

" 'Oh! you've thought better of it, have you?' said the guard, when he saw my uncle standing on the ground.

"My uncle looked at the guard for a few seconds, in some doubt whether it wouldn't be better to wrench his blunderbuss from him, fire it in the face of the man with the big sword, knock the rest of the company over the head with the stock, snatch up the young lady, and go off in the smoke. On second thoughts, however, he abandoned this plan, as being a shade too melodramatic in the execution, and followed the two mysterious men, who, keeping the lady between them, were now entering an old house, in front of which the coach had stopped. They turned into the passage, and my uncle followed.

"Of all the ruinous and desolate places my uncle had ever beheld, this was the most so. It looked as if it had once been a large house of entertainment; but the roof had fallen in in many places, and the stairs were steep, rugged, and broken. There was a huge fireplace in the room into which they walked, and the chimney was blackened with smoke; but no warm blaze lighted it up now. The white feathery dust of burnt wood was still strewed over the hearth, but the stove was cold, and all was dark and gloomy.

" 'Well,' said my uncle, as he looked about him, 'a mail travelling at the rate of six miles and a half an hour, and stopping for an indefinite time at such a hole as this, is rather an irregular sort of proceeding, I fancy. This shall be made known; I'll write to the papers.'

"My uncle said this in a pretty loud voice, and in an open unreserved sort of manner, with the view of engaging the two strangers in conversation if he could. But, neither of them took any more notice of him than whispering to each other, and scowling at him as they did so. The lady was at the farther end of the room, and once she ventured to wave her hand, as if beseeching my uncle's assistance.

"At length the two strangers advanced a little, and the conversation began in earnest.

" 'You don't know this is a private room, I suppose, fellow?' said the gentleman in sky-blue.

" 'No, I do not, fellow,' rejoined my uncle. 'Only if this is a private room specially ordered for the occasion, I should think the public room must be a *very* comfortable one.' With this my uncle sat himself down in a high-backed chair, and took such an accurate measure of the gentlemen with his eyes, that Tiggin and Welps could have supplied him with printed calico for a suit, and not an inch too much or too little, from that estimate alone.

" 'Quit this room,' said both the men together, grasping their swords.

" 'Eh?' said my uncle, not at all appearing to comprehend their meaning.

" 'Quit the room, or you are a dead man,' said the ill-looking fellow with the large sword, drawing it at the same time, and flourishing it in the air.

" 'Down with him!' cried the gentleman in sky-blue, drawing his sword also, and falling back two or three yards. 'Down with him!' The lady gave a loud scream.

"Now, my uncle was always remarkable for great boldness, and great presence of mind. All the time that he had appeared so indifferent to what was going on, he had been looking slily about for some missile or weapon of defence, and at the very instant when the swords were drawn, he espied, standing in the chimney-corner, an old basket-hilted rapier in a rusty scabbard. At one bound, my uncle caught it in his hand, drew it, flourished it gallantly above his head, called aloud to the lady to keep out of the way, hurled the chair at the man in sky-blue, and the scabbard at the man in plum-colour, and taking advantage of the confusion, fell upon them both, pell-mell.

"Gentlemen, there is an old story—none the worse for being true—regarding a fine young Irish gentleman, who, being asked if he could play the fiddle, replied he had no doubt he could, but he couldn't exactly say for certain, because he had never tried. This is not inapplicable to my uncle and his fencing. He had never had a sword in his hand before, except once when he played Richard the Third at a private theatre: upon which occasion it was arranged with Richmond that he was to be run through from behind, without showing fight at all; but here he was, cutting and slashing with two experienced swordsmen, thrusting, and guarding, and poking, and slicing, and acquitting himself in the most manful and dexterous manner possible, although up to that time, he had never been aware that he had the least notion of the science. It only shows how true the old saying is, that a man never knows what he can do till he tries, gentlemen.

"The noise of the combat was terrific; each of the three combatants swearing like troopers, and their swords clashing with as much noise as if all the knives and steels in Newport Market were rattling together at the same time. When it was at its very height, the lady, to encourage my uncle most probably, withdrew her hood entirely from her face, and disclosed a countenance of such dazzling beauty, that he would have fought against fifty men, to win one smile from it,

and die. He had done wonders before, but now he began to powder away like a raving mad giant.

"At this very moment, the gentleman in sky-blue turning round, and seeing the young lady with her face uncovered, vented an exclamation of rage and jealousy; and turning his weapon against her beautiful bosom, pointed a thrust at her heart, which caused my uncle to utter a cry of apprehension that made the building ring. The lady stepped lightly aside, and snatching the young man's sword from his hand before he had recovered his balance, drove him to the wall, and running it through him, and the panelling, up to the very hilt, pinned him there, hard and fast. It was a splendid example. My uncle, with a loud shout of triumph, and a strength that was irresistible, made his adversary retreat in the same direction, and plunging the old rapier into the very centre of a large red flower in the pattern of his waistcoat, nailed him beside his friend. There they both stood, gentlemen: jerking their arms and legs about in agony, like the toy-shop figures that are moved by a piece of packthread. My uncle always said, afterwards, that this was one of the surest means he knew of for disposing of an enemy; but it was liable to one objection on the ground of expense, inasmuch as it involved the loss of a sword for every man disabled.

"'The mail, the mail!' cried the lady, running up to my uncle and throwing her beautiful arms around his neck; 'we may yet escape.'

"'*May!*' cried my uncle; 'why, my dear, there's nobody else to kill, is there?' My uncle was rather disappointed, gentlemen, for he thought a little quiet bit of love-making would be agreeable after the slaughtering, if it were only to change the subject.

"'We have not an instant to lose here,' said the young lady. 'He (pointing to the young gentleman in the sky-blue) is the only son of the powerful Marquess of Filletoville.'

"'Well, then, my dear, I'm afraid he'll never come to the title,' said my uncle, looking coolly at the young gentleman as he stood fixed up against the wall, in the cockchafer fashion I have described. 'You have cut off the entail, my love.'

"'I have been torn from my home and friends by these villains,' said the young lady, her features glowing with indignation. 'That wretch would have married me by violence in another hour.'

"'Confound his impudence!' said my uncle, bestowing a very contemptuous look on the dying heir of Filletoville.

"'As you may guess from what you have seen,' said the young lady, 'the party were prepared to murder me if I appealed to any one for assistance. If their accomplices find us here, we are lost. Two minutes hence may be too late. The mail!' With these words, overpowered by her feelings, and the exertion of sticking the young Marquess of Filletoville, she sank into my uncle's arms. My uncle caught her up, and bore her to the house-door. There stood the mail, with four long-tailed, flowing-maned, black horses, ready harnessed; but no coachman, no guard, no hostler even, at the horses' heads.

"Gentlemen, I hope I do no injustice to my uncle's memory, when I express my opinion, that although he was a bachelor, he *had* held some ladies in his

arms before this time; I believe, indeed, that he had rather a habit of kissing barmaids; and I know that, in one or two instances, he had been seen by credible witnesses to hug a landlady in a very perceptible manner. I mention the circumstance to show what a very uncommon sort of person this beautiful young lady must have been, to have affected my uncle in the way she did; he used to say, that as her long dark hair trailed over his arm, and her beautiful dark eyes fixed themselves upon his face when she recovered, he felt so strange and nervous, that his legs trembled beneath him. But, who can look in a sweet soft pair of dark eyes without feeling queer? *I* can't, gentlemen. I am afraid to look at some eyes I know, and that's the truth of it.

"'You will never leave me,' murmured the young lady.

"'Never,' said my uncle. And he meant it too.

"'My dear preserver!' exclaimed the young lady. 'My dear, kind, brave preserver!'

"'Don't,' said my uncle, interrupting her.

"'Why?' inquired the young lady.

"'Because your mouth looks so beautiful when you speak,' rejoined my uncle, 'that I am afraid I shall be rude enough to kiss it.'

"The young lady put up her hand as if to caution my uncle not to do so, and said—no, she didn't say anything—she smiled. When you are looking at a pair of the most delicious lips in the world, and see them gently break into a roguish smile—if you are very near them, and nobody else by—you cannot better testify your admiration of their beautiful form and colour than by kissing them at once. My uncle did so, and I honour him for it.

"'Hark!' cried the young lady, starting. 'The noise of wheels and horses!'

"'So it is,' said my uncle, listening. He had a good ear for wheels and the tramping of hoofs; but there appeared to be so many horses and carriages rattling towards them from a distance, that it was impossible to form a guess at their number. The sound was like that of fifty brakes, with six blood cattle in each.

"'We are pursued!' cried the young lady, clasping her hands. 'We are pursued. I have no hope but in you!'

"There was such an expression of terror in her beautiful face, that my uncle made up his mind at once. He lifted her into the coach, told her not to be frightened, pressed his lips to hers once more, and then advising her to draw up the window to keep the cold air out, mounted to the box.

"'Stay love,' cried the young lady.

"'What's the matter?' said my uncle, from the coach-box.

"'I want to speak to you,' said the young lady; 'only a word—only one word, dearest.'

"'Must I get down?' inquired my uncle. The lady made no answer, but she smiled again. Such a smile, gentlemen!—it beat the other one all to nothing. My uncle descended from his perch in a twinkling.

"'What is it, my dear?' said my uncle, looking in at the coach window. The lady happened to bend forward at the same time, and my uncle thought she

looked more beautiful than she had done yet. He was very close to her just then, gentlemen, so he really ought to know.

"'What is it, my dear?' said my uncle.

"'Will you never love any one but me—never marry any one besides?' said the young lady.

"My uncle swore a great oath that he never would marry anybody else, and the young lady drew in her head, and pulled up the window. He jumped upon the box, squared his elbows, adjusted the ribbons, seized the whip which lay on the roof, gave one flick to the off leader, and away went the four long-tailed, flowing-maned black horses, at fifteen good English miles an hour, with the mail-coach behind them. Whew! how they tore along!

"The noise behind grew louder. The faster the old mail went, the faster came the pursuers—men, horses, dogs, were leagued in the pursuit. The noise was frightful, but, above all, rose the voice of the young lady, urging my uncle on, and shrieking 'Faster! faster!'

"They whirled past the dark trees, as feathers would be swept before a hurricane. Houses, gates, churches, haystacks, objects of every kind they shot by, with a velocity and noise like roaring water suddenly let loose. Still the noise of pursuit grew louder, and still my uncle could hear the young lady wildly screaming 'Faster! faster!'

"My uncle plied whip and rein; and the horses flew onward till they were white with foam; and yet the noise behind increased; and yet the young lady cried 'Faster! faster!' My uncle gave a loud stamp on the boot in the energy of the moment, and—found that it was grey morning, and he was sitting in the wheelwright's yard, on the box of an old Edinburgh mail, shivering with the cold and wet, and stamping his feet to warm them! He got down, and looked eagerly inside for the beautiful young lady. Alas! there was neither door nor seat to the coach—it was a mere shell.

"Of course, my uncle knew very well that there was some mystery in the matter, and that everything had passed exactly as he used to relate it. He remained staunch to the great oath he had sworn to the beautiful young lady: refusing several eligible landladies on her account, and dying a bachelor at last. He always said, what a curious thing it was that he should have found out, by such a mere accident as his clambering over the palings, that the ghosts of mail-coaches and horses, guards, coachmen, and passengers, were in the habit of making journeys regularly every night; he used to add, that he believed he was the only living person who had ever been taken as a passenger on one of these excursions; and I think he was right, gentlemen—at least I never heard of any other."

"I wonder what these ghosts of mail-coaches carry in their bags," said the landlord, who had listened to the whole story with profound attention.

"The dead letters, of course," said the bagman.

"Oh, ah—to be sure," rejoined the landlord. "I never thought of that."

Charles Allston Collins and Charles Dickens

THE TRIAL FOR MURDER

from Dr. Marigold's Prescriptions

Christmas Number of "All the Year Round," 1865

"This story, which is usually included among the works of Charles Dickens, is attributed to Collins in the official edition of the 'Letters of C. D.' " (*Letter to Percy Fitzgerald, 30 Nov., 1865.* Footnote.) Probably Dickens worked upon Collins' MS.

I have always noticed a prevalent want of courage, even among persons of superior intelligence and culture, as to imparting their own psychological experiences when those have been of a strange sort. Almost all men are afraid that what they could relate in such wise would find no parallel or response in a listener's internal life, and might be suspected or laughed at. A truthful traveller, who should have seen some extraordinary creature in the likeness of a sea-serpent, would have no fear of mentioning it; but the same traveller, having had some singular presentiment, impulse, vagary of thought, vision (so-called), dream, or other remarkable mental impression, would hesitate considerably before he would own to it. To this reticence I attribute much of the obscurity in which such subjects are involved. We do not habitually communicate our experiences of these subjective things as we do our experiences of objective creation. The consequence is, that the general stock of experience in this regard appears exceptional, and really is so, in respect of being miserably imperfect.

In what I am going to relate, I have no intention of setting up, opposing, or supporting, any theory whatever. I know the history of the Bookseller of Berlin, I have studied the case of the wife of a late Astronomer Royal as related by Sir David Brewster, and I have followed the minutest details of a much more remarkable case of Spectral Illusion occurring within my private circle of friends. It may be necessary to state as to this last, that the sufferer (a lady) was in no degree, however distant, related to me. A mistaken assumption on that head might suggest an explanation of a part of my own case,—but only a part,—which would be wholly without foundation. It cannot be referred to my inheritance of any developed peculiarity, nor had I ever before any at all similar experience, nor have I ever had any at all similar experience since.

It does not signify how many years ago, or how few, a certain murder was committed in England, which attracted great attention. We hear more than enough of murderers as they rise in succession to their atrocious eminence, and I would bury the memory of this particular brute, if I could, as his body was

buried in Newgate Jail. I purposely abstain from giving any direct clue to the criminal's individuality.

When the murder was first discovered, no suspicion fell—or I ought rather to say, for I cannot be too precise in my facts, it was nowhere publicly hinted that any suspicion fell—on the man who was afterwards brought to trial. As no reference was at that time made to him in the newspapers, it is obviously impossible that any description of him can at that time have been given in the newspapers. It is essential that this fact be remembered.

Unfolding at breakfast my morning paper, containing the account of that first discovery, I found it to be deeply interesting, and I read it with close attention. I read it twice, if not three times. The discovery had been made in a bedroom, and, when I laid down the paper, I was aware of a flash—rush—flow—I do not know what to call it,—no word I can find is satisfactorily descriptive,—in which I seemed to see that bedroom passing through my room, like a picture impossibly painted on a running river. Though almost instantaneous in its passing, it was perfectly clear; so clear that I distinctly, and with a sense of relief, observed the absence of the dead body from the bed.

It was in no romantic place that I had this curious sensation, but in chambers in Piccadilly, very near to the corner of St. James's-street. It was entirely new to me. I was in my easy-chair at the moment, and the sensation was accompanied with a peculiar shiver which started the chair from its position. (But it is to be noted that the chair ran easily on castors.) I went to one of the windows (there are two in the room, and the room is on the second floor) to refresh my eyes with the moving objects down in Piccadilly. It was a bright autumn morning, and the street was sparkling and cheerful. The wind was high. As I looked out, it brought down from the Park a quantity of fallen leaves, which a gust took, and whirled into a spiral pillar. As the pillar fell and the leaves dispersed, I saw two men on the opposite side of the way, going from West to East. They were one behind the other. The foremost man often looked back over his shoulder. The second man followed him, at a distance of some thirty paces, with his right hand menacingly raised. First, the singularity and steadiness of this threatening gesture in so public a thoroughfare attracted my attention; and next, the more remarkable circumstance that nobody heeded it. Both men threaded their way among the other passengers with a smoothness hardly consistent even with the action of walking on a pavement; and no single creature, that I could see, gave them place, touched them, or looked after them. In passing before my windows, they both stared up at me. I saw their two faces very distinctly, and I knew that I could recognise them anywhere. Not that I had consciously noticed anything very remarkable in either face, except that the man who went first had an unusually lowering appearance, and that the face of the man who followed him was of the colour of impure wax.

I am a bachelor, and my valet and his wife constitute my whole establishment. My occupation is in a certain Branch Bank, and I wish that my duties as head of a Department were as light as they are popularly supposed to be. They kept me in town that autumn, when I stood in need of change. I was not ill, but I

was not well. My reader is to make the most that can be reasonably made of my feeling jaded, having a depressing sense upon me of a monotonous life, and being "slightly dyspeptic." I am assured by my renowned doctor that my real state of health at that time justifies no stronger description, and I quote his own from his written answer to my request for it.

As the circumstances of the murder, gradually unravelling, took stronger and stronger possession of the public mind, I kept them away from mine by knowing as little about them as was possible in the midst of the universal excitement. But I knew that a verdict of Wilful Murder had been found against the suspected murderer, and that he had been committed to Newgate for trial. I also knew that his trial had been postponed over one Sessions of the Central Criminal Court, on the ground of general prejudice and want of time for the preparation of the defence. I may further have known, but I believe I did not, when, or about when, the Sessions to which his trial stood postponed would come on.

My sitting-room, bedroom, and dressing-room, are all on one floor. With the last there is no communication but through the bedroom. True, there is a door in it, once communicating with the staircase; but a part of the fitting of my bath has been—and had then been for some years—fixed across it. At the same period, and as a part of the same arrangement, the door had been nailed up and canvased over.

I was standing in my bedroom late one night, giving some directions to my servant before he went to bed. My face was towards the only available door of communication with the dressing-room, and it was closed. My servant's back was towards that door. While I was speaking to him, I saw it open, and a man look in, who very earnestly and mysteriously beckoned to me. That man was the man who had gone second of the two along Piccadilly, and whose face was of the colour of impure wax,

The figure, having beckoned, drew back, and closed the door. With no longer pause than was made by my crossing the bedroom, I opened the dressing-room door, and looked in. I had a lighted candle already in my hand. I felt no inward expectation of seeing the figure in the dressing-room, and I did not see it there.

Conscious that my servant stood amazed, I turned round to him, and said: "Derrick, could you believe that in my cool senses I fancied I saw a—" As I there laid my hand upon his breast, with a sudden start he trembled violently, and said, "O Lord, yes, sir! A dead man beckoning!"

Now I do not believe that this John Derrick, my trusty and attached servant for more than twenty years, had any impression whatever of having seen any such figure, until I touched him. The change in him was so startling, when I touched him, that I fully believe he derived his impression in some occult manner from me at that instant.

I bade John Derrick bring some brandy, and I gave him a dram, and was glad to take one myself. Of what had preceded that night's phenomenon, I told him not a single word. Reflecting on it, I was absolutely certain that I had never seen that face before, except on the one occasion in Piccadilly. Comparing its expression when beckoning at the door with its expression when it had stared up at

me as I stood at my window, I came to the conclusion that on the first occasion it had sought to fasten itself upon my memory, and that on the second occasion it had made sure of being immediately remembered.

I was not very comfortable that night, though I felt a certainty, difficult to explain, that the figure would not return. At daylight I fell into a heavy sleep, from which I was awakened by John Derrick's coming to my bedside with a paper in his hand.

This paper, it appeared, had been the subject of an altercation at the door between its bearer and my servant. It was a summons to me to serve upon a Jury at the forthcoming Sessions of the Central Criminal Court at the Old Bailey. I had never before been summoned on such a Jury, as John Derrick well knew. He believed—I am not certain at this hour whether with reason or otherwise—that that class of Jurors were customarily chosen on a lower qualification than mine, and he had at first refused to accept the summons. The man who served it had taken the matter very coolly. He had said that my attendance or non-attendance was nothing to him; there the summons was; and I should deal with it at my own peril, and not at his.

For a day or two I was undecided whether to respond to this call, or take no notice of it. I was not conscious of the slightest mysterious bias, influence, or attraction, one way or other. Of that I am as strictly sure as of every other statement that I make here. Ultimately I decided, as a break in the monotony of my life, that I would go.

The appointed morning was a raw morning in the month of November. There was a dense brown fog in Piccadilly, and it became positively black and in the last degree oppressive East of Temple Bar. I found the passages and staircases of the Court-House flaringly lighted with gas, and the Court itself similarly illuminated. I *think* that, until I was conducted by officers into the Old Court and saw its crowded state, I did not know that the Murderer was to be tried that day. I *think* that, until I was so helped into the Old Court with considerable difficulty, I did not know into which of the two Courts sitting, my summons would take me. But this must not be received as a positive assertion, for I am not completely satisfied in my mind on either point.

I took my seat in the place appropriated to Jurors in waiting, and I looked about the Court as well as I could through the cloud of fog and breath that was heavy in it. I noticed the black vapour hanging like a murky curtain outside the great windows, and I noticed the stifled sound of wheels on the straw or tan that was littered in the street; also, the hum of the people gathered there, which a shrill whistle, or a louder song or hail than the rest, occasionally pierced. Soon afterwards the Judges, two in number, entered, and took their seats. The buzz in the Court was awfully hushed. The direction was given to put the Murderer to the bar. He appeared there. And in that same instant I recognised in him the first of the two men who had gone down Piccadilly.

If my name had been called then, I doubt if I could have answered to it audibly. But it was called about sixth or eighth in the panel, and I was by that time able to say, "Here!" Now observe. As I stepped into the box, the prisoner,

who had been looking on attentively, but with no sign of concern, became violently agitated, and beckoned to his attorney. The prisoner's wish to challenge me was so manifest, that it occasioned a pause, during which the attorney, with his hand upon the dock, whispered with his client, and shook his head. I afterwards had it from the gentleman, that the prisoner's first affrighted words to him were, "*At all hazards, challenge that man!*" But that, as he would give no reason for it, and admitted that he had not even known my name until he heard it called and I appeared, it was not done.

Both on the ground already explained, that I wish to avoid reviving the unwholesome memory of that Murderer, and also because a detailed account of his long trial is by no means indispensable to my narrative, I shall confine myself closely to such incidents in the ten days and nights during which we, the Jury, were kept together, as directly bear on my own curious personal experience. It is in that, and not in the Murderer, that I seek to interest my reader. It is to that, and not to a page of the Newgate Calendar, that I beg attention.

I was chosen Foreman of the Jury. On the second morning of the trial, after evidence had been taken for two hours (I heard the church clocks strike), happening to cast my eyes over my brother jurymen, I found an inexplicable difficulty in counting them. I counted them several times, yet always with the same difficulty. In short, I made them one too many.

I touched the brother juryman whose place was next to me, and I whispered to him, "Oblige me by counting us." He looked surprised by the request, but turned his head and counted. "Why," says he, suddenly, "we are thirt—; but no, it's not possible. No. We are twelve."

According to my counting that day, we were always right in detail, but in the gross we were always one too many. There was no appearance—no figure—to account for it; but I had now an inward foreshadowing of the figure that was surely coming.

The Jury were housed at the London Tavern. We all slept in one large room on separate tables, and we were constantly in the charge and under the eye of the officer sworn to hold us in safekeeping. I see no reason for suppressing the real name of that officer. He was intelligent, highly polite, and obliging, and (I was glad to hear) much respected in the City. He had an agreeable presence, good eyes, enviable black whiskers, and a fine sonorous voice. His name was Mr. Harker.

When we turned into our twelve beds at night, Mr. Harker's bed was drawn across the door. On the night of the second day, not being disposed to lie down, and seeing Mr. Harker sitting on his bed, I went and sat beside him, and offered him a pinch of snuff. As Mr. Harker's hand touched mine in taking it from my box, a peculiar shiver crossed him, and he said, "Who is this?"

Following Mr. Harker's eyes, and looking along the room, I saw again the figure I expected—the second of the two men who had gone down Piccadilly. I rose, and advanced a few steps; then stopped, and looked round at Mr. Harker. He was quite unconcerned, laughed, and said in a pleasant way, "I thought for a

moment we had a thirteenth juryman, without a bed. But I see it is the moonlight."

Making no revelation to Mr. Harker, but inviting him to take a walk with me to the end of the room, I watched what the figure did. It stood for a few moments by the bedside of each of my eleven brother jurymen, close to the pillow. It always went to the right-hand side of the bed, and always passed out crossing the foot of the next bed. It seemed, from the action of the head, merely to look down pensively at each recumbent figure. It took no notice of me, or of my bed, which was that nearest to Mr. Harker's. It seemed to go out where the moonlight came in, through a high window, as by an aerial flight of stairs.

Next morning at breakfast, it appeared that everybody present had dreamed of the murdered man last night, except myself and Mr. Harker.

I now felt as convinced that the second man who had gone down Piccadilly was the murdered man (so to speak), as if it had been borne into my comprehension by his immediate testimony. But even this took place, and in a manner for which I was not at all prepared.

On the fifth day of the trial, when the case for the prosecution was drawing to a close, a miniature of the murdered man, missing from his bedroom upon the discovery of the deed, and afterwards found in a hiding-place where the Murderer had been seen digging, was put in evidence. Having been identified by the witness under examination, it was handed up to the Bench, and thence handed down to be inspected by the Jury. As an officer in a black gown was making his way with it across to me, the figure of the second man who had gone down Piccadilly impetuously started from the crowd, caught the miniature from the officer, and gave it to me with his own hands, at the same time saying, in a low and hollow tone—before I saw the miniature, which was in a locket—"*I was younger then, and my face was not then drained of blood.*" It also came between me and the brother juryman to whom I would have given the miniature, and between him and the brother juryman to whom he would have given it, and so passed it on through the whole of our number, and back into my possession. Not one of them, however, detected this.

At the table, and generally when we were shut up together in Mr. Harker's custody, we had from the first naturally discussed the day's proceedings a good deal. On that fifth day, the case for the prosecution being closed, and we having that side of the question in a completed shape before us, our discussion was more animated and serious. Among our number was a vestryman—the densest idiot I have ever seen at large—who met the plainest evidence with the most preposterous objections, and who was sided with by two flabby parochial parasites; all the three impanelled from a district so delivered over to Fever that they ought to have been upon their own trial for five hundred Murders. When these mischievous blockheads were at their loudest, which was towards midnight, while some of us were already preparing for bed, I again saw the murdered man. He stood grimly behind them, beckoning to me. On my going towards them, and striking into the conversation, he immediately retired. This was the beginning of a separate series of appearances, confined to that long room in which We were

confined. Whenever a knot of my brother jurymen laid their heads together, I saw the head of the murdered man among theirs. Whenever their comparison of notes was going against him, he would solemnly and irresistibly beckon to me.

It will be borne in mind that down to the production of the miniature, on the fifth day of the trial, I had never seen the Appearance in Court. Three changes occurred now that we entered on the case for the defence. Two of them I will mention together, first. The figure was now in Court continually, and it never there addressed itself to me, but always to the person who was speaking at the time. For instance: the throat of the murdered man had been cut straight across. In the opening speech for the defence, it was suggested that the deceased might have cut his own throat. At that very moment, the figure, with its throat in the dreadful condition referred to (this it had concealed before), stood at the speaker's elbow, motioning across and across its windpipe, now with the right hand, now with the left, vigorously suggesting to the speaker himself the impossibility of such a wound having been self-inflicted by either hand. For another instance: a witness to character, a woman, deposed to the prisoner's being the most amiable of mankind. The figure at that instant stood on the floor before her, looking her full in the face, and pointing out the prisoner's evil countenance with an extended arm and an outstretched finger.

The third change now to be added impressed me strongly as the most marked and striking of all. I do not theorise upon it; I accurately state it, and there leave it. Although the Appearance was not itself perceived by those whom it addressed, its coming close to such persons was invariably attended by some trepidation of disturbance on their part. It seemed to me as if it were prevented by laws to which I was not amenable, from fully revealing itself to others, and yet as if it could invisibly, dumbly, and darkly overshadow their minds. When the leading counsel for the defence suggested that hypothesis of suicide, and the figure stood at the learned gentleman's elbow, frightfully sawing at its severed throat, it is undeniable that the counsel faltered in his speech, lost for a few seconds the thread of his ingenious discourse, wiped his forehead with his handkerchief, and turned extremely pale. When the witness to character was confronted by the Appearance, her eyes most certainly did follow the direction of its pointed finger, and rest in great hesitation and trouble upon the prisoner's face. Two additional illustrations will suffice. On the eighth day of the trial, after the pause which was every day made early in the afternoon for a few minutes' rest and refreshment, I came back into Court with the rest of the Jury some little time before the return of the Judges. Standing up in the box and looking about me, I thought the figure was not there, until, chancing to raise my eyes to the gallery, I saw it bending forward, and leaning over a very decent woman, as if to assure itself whether the Judges had resumed their seats or not. Immediately afterwards that woman screamed, fainted, and was carried out. So with the venerable sagacious, and patient Judge who conducted the trial. When the case was over, and he settled himself and his papers to sum up, the murdered man, entering by the Judges' door, advanced to his Lordship's desk, and looked eagerly over his shoulder at the pages of his notes which he was turning. A change came over his

Lordship's face; his hand stopped; the peculiar shiver, that I knew so well, passed over him; he faltered, "Excuse me, gentlemen, for a few moments I am somewhat oppressed by the vitiated air;" and did not recover until he had drunk a glass of water.

Through all the monotony of six of those interminable ten days,—the same Judges and others on the bench, the same Murderer in the dock, the same lawyers at the table, the same tones of question and answer rising to the roof of the court, the same scratching of the Judge's pen, the same ushers going in and out, the same lights kindled at the same hour when there had been any natural light of day, the same foggy curtain outside the great windows when it was foggy, the same rain pattering and dripping when it was raining, the same footmarks of turnkeys and prisoner day after day on the same sawdust, the same keys locking and unlocking the same heavy doors—through all the wearisome monotony which made me feel as if I had been Foreman of the Jury for a vast period of time, and Piccadilly had flourished coevally with Babylon, the murdered man never lost one trace of his distinctness in my eyes, nor was he at any moment less distinct than anybody else. I must not omit, as a matter of fact, that I never once saw the Appearance which I call by the name of the murdered man look at the Murderer. Again and again I wondered, "Why does he not?" But he never did.

Nor did he look at me, after the production of the miniature, until the last closing minutes of the trial arrived. We retired to consider, at seven minutes before ten at night. The idiotic vestryman and his two parochial parasites gave us so much trouble that we twice returned into Court to beg to have certain extracts from the Judge's notes re-read. Nine of us had not the smallest doubt about those passages, neither, I believe, had any one in the Court; the dunderheaded triumvirate, however, having no idea but obstruction, disputed them for that very reason. At length we prevailed, and finally the Jury returned into Court at ten minutes past twelve.

The murdered man at that time stood directly opposite the Jury-box, on the other side of the Court. As I took my place, his eyes rested on me with great attention; he seemed satisfied, and slowly shook a great gray veil, which he carried on his arm for the first time, over his head and whole form. As I gave in our verdict, "Guilty," the veil collapsed, all was gone, and his place was empty.

The Murderer, being asked by the Judge, according to usage, whether he had anything to say before sentence of Death should be passed upon him, indistinctly muttered something which was described in the leading newspapers of the following day as "a few rambling, incoherent, and half-audible words, in which he was understood to complain that he had not had a fair trial, because the Foreman of the Jury was prepossessed against him." The remarkable declaration that he really made was this: "*My Lord, I knew I was a doomed man, when the Foreman of my Jury came into the box. My Lord, I knew he would never let me off, because, before I was taken, he somehow got to my bedside in the night, woke me, and put a rope round my neck.*"

M. R. James

MARTIN'S CLOSE

from More Ghost Stories of an Antiquary

Edward Arnold, 1911

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Some few years back I was staying with the rector of a parish in the West, where the society to which I belong owns property. I was to go over some of this land; and, on the first morning of my visit, soon after breakfast, the estate carpenter and general handy-man, John Hill, was announced as in readiness to accompany us. The rector asked which part of the parish we were to visit that morning. The estate map was produced, and when we had showed him our round, he put his finger on a particular spot. "Don't forget," he said, "to ask John Hill about Martin's Close when you get there. I should like to hear what he tells you." "What ought he to tell us?" I said. "I haven't the slightest idea," said the rector, "or, if that is not exactly true, it will do till lunch-time." And here he was called away.

We set out. John Hill is not a man to withhold such information as he possesses on any point, and you may gather from him much that is of interest about the people of the place and their talk. An unfamiliar word, or one that he thinks ought to be unfamiliar to you, he will usually spell—as c-o-b cob, and the like. It is not, however, relevant to my purpose to record his conversation before the moment when we reached Martin's Close. The bit of land is noticeable, for it is one of the smallest enclosures you are likely to see—a very few square yards, hedged in with quickset on all sides, and without any gate or gap leading into it. You might take it for a small cottage garden long deserted, but that it lies away from the village and bears no trace of cultivation. It is at no great distance from the road, and is part of what is there called a moor, in other words, a rough upland pasture cut up into largish fields.

"Why is this little bit hedged off so?" I asked, and John Hill (whose answer I cannot represent as perfectly as I should like) was not at fault. "That's what we call Martin's Close, sir; 'tes a curious thing 'bout that bit of land, sir; goes by the name of Martin's Close, sir. M-a-r-t-i-n Martin. Beg pardon, sir, did Rector tell you to make enquiry of me 'bout that, sir?" "Yes he did." "Ah, I thought so much, sir. I was tell'n Rector 'bout that last week, and he was very much interested. It 'pears there's a murderer buried there, sir, by the name of Martin. Old Mr. Samuel Saunders, that formerly lived yurr at what we call Southtown, sir, he had a long tale 'bout that, sir; terrible murder done 'pon a

young woman, sir. Cut her throat and cast her in the water down yurr." "Was he hung for it?" "Yes, sir, he was hung just up yurr on the roadway, by what I've 'eard, on the Holy Innocents' Day, many 'undred years ago, by the man that went by the name of the bloody judge; terrible red and bloody, I've 'eard." "Was his name Jefferies, do you think?" "Might be possible 'twas—Jefferies—J-e-f—Jefferies. I reckon 'twas, and the tale I've 'eard many times from Mr. Saunders, how this young man Martin—George Martin—was troubled before his cruel action come to light by the young woman's sperit." "How was that, do you know?" "No, sir, I don't exactly know how 'twas with it; but by what I've 'eard he was fairly tormented; and rightly tu. Old Mr. Saunders, he told a history regarding a cupboard down yurr in the New Inn. According to what he related, this young woman's sperit come out of this cupboard; but I don't recollact the matter."

This was the sum of John Hill's information. We passed on, and in due time I reported what I had heard to the rector. He was able to show me from the parish account-books that a gibbet had been paid for in 1684, and a grave dug in the following year, both for the benefit of George Martin; but he was unable to suggest any one in the parish, Saunders being now gone, who was likely to throw any further light on the story.

Naturally, upon my return to the neighbourhood of libraries, I made search in the more obvious places. The trial seemed to be nowhere reported. A newspaper of the time, and one or more newsletters, however, had some short notices, from which I learnt that, on the ground of local prejudice against the prisoner (he was described as a young gentleman of a good estate) the venue had been moved from Exeter to London; that Jefferies had been the judge, and death the sentence, and that there had been some "singular passages" in the evidence. Nothing further transpired till September of this year. A friend who knew me to be interested in Jefferies then sent me a leaf torn out of a secondhand bookseller's catalogue with the entry: JEFFERIES, JUDGE: *Interesting old MS. trial for murder*, and so forth, from which I gathered, to my delight, that I could become possessed, for a very few shillings, of what seemed to be a verbatim report, in shorthand, of the Martin trial. I telegraphed for the manuscript and got it. It was a thin bound volume, provided with a title written in longhand by some one in the eighteenth century, who had also added this note: "My father, who took these notes in court, told me that the prisoner's friends had made interest with Judge Jefferies that no report should be put out: he had intended doing this himself when times were better, and had shew'd it to the Revd. Mr. Glanvil, who encourag'd his design very warmly, but death surpriz'd them both before it could be brought to an accomplishment."

The initials W. G. are appended; I am advised that the original reporter may have been T. Gurney, who appears in that capacity in more than one State trial.

This was all that I could read for myself. After no long delay I heard of some one who was capable of deciphering the shorthand of the seventeenth century, and a little time ago the type-written copy of the whole manuscript was laid before me. The portions which I shall communicate here help to fill in the very

imperfect outline which subsists in the memories of John Hill and, I suppose, one or two others who live on the scene of the events.

The report begins with a species of preface, the general effect of which is that the copy is not that actually taken in court, though it is a true copy in regard of the notes of what was said; but that the writer has added to it some "remarkable passages" that took place during the trial, and has made this present fair copy of the whole, intending at some favourable time to publish it; but has not put it into longhand, lest it should fall into the possession of unauthorised persons, and he or his family deprived of the profit.

The report then begins:

This case came on to be tried on Wednesday, the 19th of November, between our sovereign lord the King, and George Martin Esquire, of (I take leave to omit some of the place-names), at a sessions of oyer and terminer and gaol delivery, at the Old Bailey, and the prisoner, being in Newgate, was brought to the bar.

Clerk of the Crown: George Martin, hold up thy hand (which he did).

Then the indictment was read, which set forth that the prisoner "not having the fear of God before his eyes, but being moved and seduced by the instigation of the devil, upon the 15th day of May, in the 36th year of our sovereign lord King Charles the Second, with force and arms in the parish aforesaid, in and upon Ann Clark, spinster, of the same place, in the peace of God and of our said sovereign lord the King then and there being feloniously, willfully, and of your malice aforethought, did make an assault and with a certain knife value a penny, the throat of the said Ann Clark then and there did cut, of the which wound the said Ann Clark then and there did die, and the body of the said Ann Clark did cast into a certain pond of water situate in the same parish (with more that is not material to our purpose) against the peace of our sovereign lord the King, his crown and dignity."

Then the prisoner prayed a copy of the indictment.

L. C. J. (Sir George Jefferies): What is this? Sure you know that is never allowed. Besides, here is a plain indictment as ever I heard; you have nothing to do but to plead to it.

Pris.: My lord, I apprehend there may be a matter of law arising out of the indictment, and I would humbly beg the court to assign me counsel to consider of it. Besides, my lord, I believe it was done in another case: copy of the indictment was allowed.

L. C. J.: What case was that?

Pris.: Truly, my lord, I have been kept close prisoner ever since I came up from Exeter Castle, and no one allowed to come at me and no one to advise with.

L. C. J.: But I say, what was that case you allege?

Pris.: My lord, I cannot tell your lordship precisely the name of the case, but it is in my mind that there was such an one, and I would humbly desire——

L. C. J.: All this is nothing. Name your case, and we will tell you whether there be any matter for you in it. God forbid but you should have anything that

may be allowed you by law; but this is against law, and we must keep the course of the court.

Att. Gen. (Sir Robert Sawyer): My lord, we pray for the King that he may be asked to plead.

Cl. of Ct.: Are you guilty of the murder whereof you stand indicted, or not guilty?

Pris.: My lord, I would humbly offer this to the court. If I plead now, shall I have an opportunity after to except against the indictment?

L. C. J.: Yes, yes, that comes after verdict; that will be saved to you, and counsel assigned if there be matter of law; but that which you have now to do is to plead.

Then after some little parleying with the court (which seemed strange upon such a plain indictment) the prisoner pleaded, *Not Guilty*.

Cl. of Ct.: Culprit. How wilt thou be tried?

Pris.: By God and my country.

Cl. of Ct.: God send thee a good deliverance.

L. C. J.: Why, how is this? Here has been a great to-do that you should not be tried at Exeter by your country, but be brought here to London, and now you ask to be tried by your country. Must we send you to Exeter again?

Pris.: My lord, I understood it was the form.

L. C. J.: So it is, man: we spoke only in the way of pleasantness. Well, go on and swear the jury.

So they were sworn. I omit the names. There was no challenging on the prisoner's part, for, as he said, he did not know any of the persons called. Thereupon the prisoner asked for the use of pen, ink, and paper, to which the L. C. J. replied: "Ay, ay, in God's name let him have it." Then the usual charge was delivered to the jury, and the case opened by the junior counsel for the King, Mr. Dolben.

The Attorney-General followed:

May it please your lordship, and you gentlemen of the jury, I am of counsel for the King against the prisoner at the bar. You have heard that he stands indicted for a murder done upon the person of a young girl. Such crimes as this you may perhaps reckon not to be uncommon, and, indeed, in these times, I am sorry to say it, there is scarce any fact so barbarous and unnatural but what we may hear almost daily instances of it. But I must confess that in this murder that is charged upon the prisoner, there are some particular features that mark it out to be such as I hope has but seldom if ever been perpetrated upon English ground. For as we shall make it appear, the person murdered was a poor country girl (whereas the prisoner is a gentleman of a proper estate) and, besides that, was one to whom Providence had not given the full use of her intellects, but was what is termed among us commonly an innocent or natural: such an one, therefore, as one would have supposed a gentleman of the prisoner's quality more likely to overlook, or, if he did notice her, to be moved to compassion for

her unhappy condition, than to lift up his hand against her in the very horrid and barbarous manner which we shall show you he used.

Now to begin at the beginning and open the matter to you orderly: About Christmas of last year, that is the year 1683, this gentleman, Mr. Martin, having newly come back into his own country from the University of Cambridge, some of his neighbours, to show him what civility they could (for his family is one that stands in very good repute all over that country) entertained him here and there at their Christmas merrymakings, so that he was constantly riding to and fro, from one house to another, and sometimes, when the place of his destination was distant, or for other reasons, as the unsafeness of the roads, he would be constrained to lie the night at an inn. In this way it happened that he came, a day or two after the Christmas, to the place where this young girl lived with her parents, and put up at the inn there, called the New Inn, which is, as I am informed, a house of good repute. Here was some dancing going on among the people of the place, and Ann Clark has been brought in, it seems, by her elder sister to look on; but being, as I have said, of weak understanding, and, besides that, very uncomely in her appearance, it was not likely that she should take much part in the merriment; and accordingly was but standing by in a corner of the room. The prisoner at the bar, seeing her, one must suppose by way of a jest, asked her would she dance with him. And in spite of what her sister and others could say to prevent it and to dissuade her——

L. C. J.: Come, Mr. Attorney, we are not set here to listen to tales of Christmas parties in taverns. I would not interrupt you, but sure you have more weighty matters than this. You will be telling us next what tune they danced to.

Att.: My lord, I would not take up the time of the court with what is not material: but we reckon it to be material to show how this unlikely acquaintance begun: and as for the tune, I believe, indeed, our evidence will show that even that hath a bearing on the matter in hand.

L. C. J.: Go on, go on, in God's name: but give us nothing that is impertinent.

Att.: Indeed, my lord, I will keep to my matter. But, gentlemen, having now shown you, as I think, enough of this first meeting between the murdered person and the prisoner, I will shorten my tale so far as to say that from then on there were frequent meetings of the two: for the young woman was greatly tickled with having got hold (as she conceived it) of so likely a sweetheart, and he being once a week at least in the habit of passing through the street where she lived, she would be always on the watch for him; and it seemed they had a signal arranged: he should whistle the tune that was played at the tavern: it is a tune, as I am informed, well known in that country, and has a burden, "*Madame, will you walk, will you talk with me?*"

L. C. J.: Ay, I remember it in my own country, in Shropshire. It runs somehow thus, doth it not? (Here his lordship whistled a part of a tune, which was very observable, and seemed below the dignity of the court. And it appears he felt it so himself, for he said): But this is by the mark, and I doubt it is the first time we have had dance-tunes in this court. The most part of the dancing we give occasion for is done at Tyburn. (Looking at the prisoner, who appeared very

much disordered.) You said the tune was material to your case, Mr. Attorney, and upon my life I think Mr. Martin agrees with you. What ails you, man? staring like a player that sees a ghost?

Pris.: My lord, I was amazed at hearing such trivial, foolish things as they bring against me.

L. C. J.: Well, well, it lies upon Mr. Attorney to show whether they be trivial or not: but I must say, if he has nothing worse than this he has said, you have no great cause to be in amaze. Doth it not lie something deeper? But go on, Mr. Attorney.

Att.: My lord and gentlemen—all that I have said so far you may indeed very reasonably reckon as having an appearance of triviality. And, to be sure, had the matter gone no further than the humouring of a poor silly girl by a young gentleman of quality, it had been very well. But to proceed. We shall make it appear that after three or four weeks the prisoner became contracted to a young gentlewoman of that country, one suitable every way to his own condition, and such an arrangement was on foot that seemed to promise him a happy and a reputable living. But within no very long time it seems that this young gentlewoman, hearing of the jest that was going about that countryside with regard to the prisoner and Ann Clark, conceived that it was not only an unworthy carriage on the part of her lover, but a derogation to herself that he should suffer his name to be sport for tavern company: and so without more ado she, with the consent of her parents, signified to the prisoner that the match between them was at an end. We shall show you that upon the receipt of this intelligence the prisoner was greatly enraged against Ann Clark as being the cause of his misfortune, (though indeed there was nobody answerable for it but himself), and that he made use of many outrageous expressions and threatenings against her, and subsequently upon meeting with her both abused her and struck at her with his whip: but she, being but a poor innocent, could not be persuaded to desist from her attachment to him, but would often run after him testifying with gestures and broken words the affection she had to him: until she was become, as he said, the very plague of his life. Yet, being that affairs in which he was now engaged necessarily took him by the house in which she lived, he could not (as I am willing to believe he would otherwise have done) avoid meeting with her from time to time. We shall further show you that this was the posture of things up to the 15th day of May in this present year. Upon that day the prisoner comes riding through the village, as of custom, and met with the young woman: but in place of passing her by, as he had lately done, he stopped, and said some words to her with which she appeared wonderfully pleased, and so left her; and, after that day she was nowhere to be found, notwithstanding a strict search was made for her. The next time of the prisoner's passing through the place, her relations enquired of him whether he should know anything of her whereabouts; which he totally denied. They expressed to him their fears lest her weak intellects should have been upset by the attention he had showed her, and so she might have committed some rash act against her own life, calling him to witness the same time how often they had beseeched

him to desist from taking notice of her, as fearing trouble might come of it: but this, too, he easily laughed away. But in spite of this light behaviour, it was noticeable in him that about this time his carriage and demeanour changed, and it was said of him that he seemed a troubled man. And here I come to a passage which I should not dare to ask your attention, but that it appears to me to be founded in truth, and is supported by testimony deserving of credit. And, gentlemen, to my judgment it doth afford a great instance of God's revenge against murder, and that He will require the blood of the innocent.

(Here Mr. Attorney made a pause, and shifted with his papers: and it was thought remarkable by me and others, because he was a man not easily dashed.)

L. C. J.: Well, Mr. Attorney, what is your instance?

Att.: My lord, it is a strange one, and the truth is that, of all the cases I have been concerned in, I cannot call to mind the like of it. But to be short, gentlemen, we shall bring you testimony that Ann Clark was seen after this 15th of May, and that, at such time as she was so seen, it was impossible she could have been a living person.

(Here the people made a hum, and a good deal of laughter, and the Court called for silence, and when it was made):

L. C. J.: Why, Mr. Attorney, you might save up this tale for a week; it will be Christmas by that time, and you can frighten your cook-maids with it (at which the people laughed again, and the prisoner also, as it seemed). God, man, what are you prating of—ghosts and Christmas jigs and tavern company—and here is a man's life at stake! (To the prisoner): And you, sir, I would have you know there is not so much occasion for you to make merry neither. You were not brought here for that, and if I know Mr. Attorney, he has more in his brief than he has shown yet. Go on, Mr. Attorney. I need not, mayhap, have spoken so sharply, but you must confess your course is something unusual.

Att.: Nobody knows it better than I my lord: but I shall bring it to an end with a round turn. I shall show you, gentlemen, that Ann Clark's body was found in the month of June, in a pond of water, with the throat cut: that a knife belonging to the prisoner was found in the same water: that he made efforts to recover the said knife from the water: that the coroner's quest brought in a verdict against the prisoner at the bar, and that therefore he should by course have been tried at Exeter: but that, suit being made on his behalf, on account that an impartial jury could not be found to try him in his own country, he hath had that singular favour shown him that he should be tried here in London. And so we will proceed to call our evidence.

Then the facts of the acquaintance between the prisoner and Ann Clark were proved, and also the coroner's inquest. I pass over this portion of the trial, for it offers nothing of special interest.

Sarah Arscott was next called and shown.

Att.: What is your occupation?

S.: I keep the New Inn at—

Att.: Do you know the prisoner at the bar?

S.: Yes; he was often at our house since he come first at Christmas of last year.

Att.: Did you know Ann Clark?

S.: Yes, very well.

Att.: Pray, what manner of person was she in her appearance?

S.: She was a very short thick-made woman: I do not know what else you would have me say.

Att.: Was she comely?

S.: No, not by no manner of means: she was very uncomely, poor child! She had a great face and hanging chops and a very bad colour like a puddock.

L. C. J.: What is that, mistress? What say you she was like?

S.: My lord, I ask pardon; I heard Esquire Martin say she looked like a puddock in the face; and so she did.

L. C. J.: Did you that? Can you interpret her, Mr. Attorney?

Att.: My lord, I apprehend it is the country word for a toad?

L. C. J.: Oh, a hop-toad! Ay, go on.

Att.: Will you give an account to the jury of what passed between you and the prisoner at the bar on May last?

S.: Sir, it was this. It was about nine o'clock the evening after that Ann did not come home, and I was about my work in the house; there was no company there only Thomas Snell, and it was foul weather. Esquire Martin came in and called for some drink, and I, by way of pleasantry, I said to him, "'Squire, have you been looking after your sweetheart?" and he flew out at me in a passion and desired I would not use such expressions. I was amazed at that, because we were accustomed to joke with him about her.

L. C. J.: Who, her?

S.: Ann Clark, my lord. And we had not heard the news of his being contracted to a young gentlewoman elsewhere, or I am sure I should have used better manners. So I said nothing, but being I was a little put out, I begun singing, to myself as it were, the song they danced to the first time they met, for I thought it would prick him. It was the same that he was used to sing when he came down the street; I have heard it very often: "*Madame, will you walk, will you talk with me?*" And it fell out that I needed something that was in the kitchen. So I went out to get it, and all the time I went on singing, something louder and more bold-like. And as I was there all of a sudden I thought I heard some one answering outside the house, but I could not be sure because of the wind blowing so high. So then I stopped singing, and now I heard it plain, saying, "*Yes, sir, I will walk, I will talk with you,*" and I knew the voice for Ann Clark's voice.

Att.: How did you know it to be her voice?

S.: It was impossible I could be mistaken. She had a dreadful voice, a kind

of a squalling voice, in particular if she tried to sing. And there was nobody in the village that could counterfeit it, for they often tried. So, hearing that, I was glad, because we were all in an anxiety to know what was gone with her: for though she was a natural, she had a good disposition and was very tractable: and says I to myself, "What, child! are you returned, then?" and I ran into the front room, and said to Squire Martin as I passed by, "Squire, here is your sweetheart back again: shall I call her in?" and with that I went to open the door; but Squire Martin he caught hold of me, and it seemed to me he was out of his wits, or near upon. "Hold, woman," says he, "in God's name" and I know not what else: he was all of a shake. Then I was angry, and said I, "What! are you not glad that poor child is found?" and I called to Thomas Snell and said, "If the Squire will not let me, do you open the door and call her in." So Thomas Snell went and opened the door, and the wind setting that way blew in and overset the two candles that was all we had lighted: and Esquire Martin fell away from holding me; I think he fell down on the floor, but we were wholly in the dark, and it was a minute or two before I got a light again: and while I was feeling for the firebox, I am not certain but I heard some one step 'cross the floor, and I am sure I heard the door of the great cupboard that stands in the room open and shut to. Then, when I had a light again, I see Esquire Martin on the settle, all white and sweaty as if he had swounded away, and his arms hanging down; and I was going to help him; but just then it caught my eye that there was something like a bit of a dress shut into the cupboard door, and it came to my mind I had heard that door shut. So I thought it might be some person had run in when the light was quenched, and was hiding in the cupboard. So I went up closer and looked: and there was a bit of a black stuff cloak, and just below it an edge of a brown stuff dress, both sticking out of the shut of the door: and both of them was low down, as if the person that had them on might be crouched down inside.

Att.: What did you take it to be?

S.: I took it to be a woman's dress.

Att.: Could you make any guess whom it belonged to? Did you know anyone who wore such a dress?

S.: It was common stuff, by what I could see. I have seen many women wearing such a stuff in our parish.

Att.: Was it like Ann Clark's dress?

S.: She used to wear just such a dress: but I could not say on my oath it was hers.

Att.: Did you observe anything else about it?

S.: I did notice that it looked very wet: but it was foul weather outside.

L. C. J.: Did you feel of it, mistress?

S.: No, my lord, I did not like to touch it.

L. C. J.: Not like? Why that? Are you so nice that you scruple to feel of a wet dress?

S.: Indeed, my lord, I cannot very well tell why: only it had a nasty ugly look about it.

L. C. J.: Well, go on.

S.: Then I called again to Thomas Snell, and bid him come to me and catch any one that come out when I should open the cupboard door, "for," says I, "there is some one hiding within, and I would know what she wants." And with that Squire Martin gave a sort of cry or a shout and ran out of the house into the dark, and I felt the cupboard door pushed out against me while I held it, and Thomas Snell helped me: but for all we pressed to keep it shut as hard as we could, it was forced out against us, and we had to fall back.

L. C. J.: And pray what came out—a mouse?

S.: No, my lord, it was greater than a mouse, but I could not see what it was: it fleeted very swift over the floor and out at the door.

L. C. J.: But come; what did it look like? Was it a person?

S.: My lord, I cannot tell what it was, but it ran very low, and it was of a dark colour. We were both daunted by it, Thomas Snell and I, but we made all the haste we could after it to the door that stood open. And we looked out, but it was dark and we could see nothing.

L. C. J.: Were there no tracks of it on the floor? What floor have you there?

S.: It is a flagged floor and sanded, my lord, and there was an appearance of a wet track on the floor, but we could make nothing of it, neither Thomas Snell nor me, and besides, as I said, it was a foul night.

L. C. J.: Well, for my part, I see not—though to be sure it is an odd tale she tells—what you would do with this evidence.

Att.: My lord, we bring it to show the suspicious carriage of the prisoner immediately after the disappearance of the murdered person: and we ask the jury's consideration of that; and also to the matter of the voice heard without the house.

Then the prisoner asked some questions not very material, and Thomas Snell was next called, who gave evidence to the same effect as Mrs. Arscott, and added the following:

Att.: Did anything pass between you and the prisoner during the time Mrs. Arscott was out of the room?

Th.: I had a piece of twist in my pocket.

Att.: Twist of what?

Th.: Twist of tobacco, sir, and I felt a disposition to take a pipe of tobacco. So I found a pipe on the chimney-piece, and being it was twist, and in regard of me having by an oversight left my knife at my house, and me not having over many teeth to pluck at it, as your lordship or anyone else may have a view by their own eyesight—

L. C. J.: What is the man talking about? Come to the matter, fellow! Do you think we sit here to look at your teeth?

Th.: No, my lord, nor I would not you should do, God forbid! I know your honours have better employment, and better teeth, I would not wonder.

L. C. J.: Good God, what a man is this! Yes, I *have* better teeth, and that you shall find if you keep not to the purpose.

Th.: I humbly ask pardon, my lord, but so it was. And I took upon me, thinking no harm, to ask Squire Martin to lend me his knife to cut my tobacco. And he felt first of one pocket and then of another and it was not there at all. And says I, "What! have you lost your knife, Squire?" And up he gets and feels again and he sat down, and such a groan as he gave, "Good God!" he says, "I must have left it there." "But," says I, "Squire, by all appearance it is *not* there. Did you set a value on it," says I, "you might have it cried." But he sat there and put his head between the hands and seemed to take no notice to what I said. And then it was Mistress Arscott come tracking back out of the kitchen place.

Asked if he heard the voice singing outside the house, he said, "No," but the door into the kitchen was shut, and there was a high wind: but says that no one could mistake Ann Clark's voice.

Then a boy, William Reddaway, about thirteen years of age, was called, and by the usual questions, put by the Lord Chief Justice, it was ascertained that he knew the nature of an oath. And so he was sworn. His evidence referred to a time about a week later.

Att.: Now, child, don't be frighted: there is no one here will hurt you if you speak the truth.

L. C. J.: Ay, if he speak the truth. But remember, child, thou art in the presence of the great God of heaven and earth, that hath the keys of hell, and of us that are the king's officers, and have the keys of Newgate; and remember, too, there is a man's life in question; and if thou tellest a lie, and by that means he comes to an ill end, thou art no better than his murderer; and so speak the truth.

Att.: Tell the jury what you know, and speak out. Where were you on the evening of the 23rd of May last?

L. C. J.: Why, what does such a boy as this know of days. Can you mark the day, boy?

W.: Yes, my lord, it was the day before our feast, and I was to spend sixpence there, and that falls a month before Midsummer Day.

One of the Jury: My lord, we cannot hear what he says.

L. C. J.: He says he remembers the day because it was the day before the feast they had there, and he had sixpence to lay out. Set him up on the table there. Well, child, and where wast thou then?

W.: Keeping cows on the moor, my lord.

But, the boy using the country speech, my lord could not well apprehend him, and so asked if there was any one that could interpret him, and it was answered the parson of the parish was there, and he was accordingly sworn and so the evidence given. The boy said—

"I was on the moor about six o'clock, and sitting behind a bush of furze near a pond of water: and the prisoner came very cautiously and looking about him,

having something like a long pole in his hand, and stopped a good while as if he would be listening, and then began to feel in the water with the pole: and I being very near the water—not above five yards—heard as if the pole struck up against something that made a wallowing sound, and the prisoner dropped the pole and threw himself on the ground, and rolled himself about very strangely with his hands to his ears, and so after a while got up and went creeping away."

Asked if he had had any communication with the prisoner, "Yes, a day or two before, the prisoner, hearing I was used to be on the moor, he asked me if I had seen a knife laying about, and said he would give sixpence to find it. And I said I had not seen any such thing, but I would ask about. Then he said he would give me sixpence to say nothing, and so he did.

L. C. J.: And was that the sixpence you were to lay out at the feast?

W.: Yes, if you please, my lord.

Asked if he had observed anything particular as to the pond of water, he said, "No, except that it begun to have a very ill smell and the cows would not drink of it for some days before."

Asked if he had ever seen the prisoner and Ann Clark in company together, he began to cry very much, and it was a long time before they could get him to speak intelligibly. At last the parson of the parish, Mr. Matthews, got him to be quiet, and the question being put to him again, he said he had seen Ann Clark waiting on the moor for the prisoner at some way off, several times since last Christmas.

Att.: Did you see her close, so as to be sure it was she?

W.: Yes, quite sure.

L. C. J.: How quite sure, child?

W.: Because she would stand and jump up and down and clap her arms like a goose (which he called by some country name: but the parson explained it to be a goose). And then she was of such a shape that it could not be no one else.

Att.: What was the last time that you so saw her?

Then the witness began to cry again and clung very much to Mr. Matthews, who bid him not to be frightened. And so at last he told this story: that on the day before their feast (being the same evening that he had before spoken of) after the prisoner had gone away, it being then twilight, and he very desirous to get home, but afraid for the present to stir from where he was lest the prisoner should see him, remained some few minutes behind the bush, looking on the pond, and saw something dark come up out of the water at the edge of the pond furthest away from him, and so up the bank. And when it got to the top where he could see it plain against the sky, it stood up and flapped the arms up and down, and then run off very swiftly in the same direction the prisoner had taken: and being asked very strictly who he took it to be, he said upon his oath that it could be nobody but Ann Clark.

Thereafter his master was called, and gave evidence that the boy had come home very late that evening and been chided for it, and that he seemed very much amazed, but could give no account of the reason.

Att.: My lord, we have done with our evidence for the King.

Then the Lord Chief Justice called upon the prisoner to make his defence; which he did, though at no great length, and in a very halting way, saying that he hoped the jury would not go about to take his life on the evidence of a parcel of country people and children that would believe any idle tale; and that he had been very much prejudiced in his trial; at which the L. C. J. interrupted him, saying that he had had singular favour shown to him in having his trial removed from Exeter, which the prisoner acknowledging, said that he meant rather that since he was brought to London there had not been care taken to keep him secured from interruption and disturbance. Upon which the L. C. J. ordered the Marshal to be called, and questioned him about the safekeeping of the prisoner, but could find nothing: except the Marshal said that he had been informed by the underkeeper that they had seen a person outside his door or going up the stairs to it: but there was no possibility the person should have got in. And it being enquired further what sort of person this might be, the Marshal could not speak to it save by hearsay, which was not allowed. And the prisoner, being asked if this was what he meant, said no, he knew nothing of that, but it was very hard that a man should not be suffered to be at quiet when his life stood on it. But it was observed he was very hasty in his denial. And so he said no more, and called no witnesses. Whereupon the Attorney-General spoke to the jury. (A full report of what he said is given, and, if time allowed, I would extract that portion in which he dwells on the alleged appearance of the murdered person: he quotes some authorities of ancient date, as St. Augustine *de cura pro mortuis gerenda*—a favourite book of reference with the old writers on the supernatural—and also cites some cases which may be seen in Glanvil's, but more conveniently in Mr. Lang's books. He does not, however, tell us more of those cases than is to be found in print.)

The Lord Chief Justice then summed up the evidence for the jury. His speech, again, contains nothing that I find worth copying out: but he was naturally impressed with the singular character of the evidence, saying that he had never heard such given in his experience; but that there was nothing in law to set it aside, and that the jury must consider whether they believed these witnesses or not.

And the jury, after a very short consultation, brought the prisoner in Guilty.

So he was asked whether he had anything to say in arrest of judgment, and pleaded that his name was spelt wrong in the indictment, being Martin with an I, whereas it should be with a Y. But this was overruled as not material, Mr. Attorney saying, moreover, that he could bring evidence to show that the prisoner by times wrote it as it was laid in the indictment. And the prisoner, having nothing further to offer, sentence of death was passed upon him, and that he should be hanged in chains upon a gibbet near the place where the fact was committed, and that execution should take place upon the 28th December next ensuing, being Innocents' Day.

Thereafter the prisoner, being to all appearances in a state of desperation, made shift to ask the L. C. J. that his relations might be allowed to come to him during the short time he had to live.

L. C. J.: Ay, with all my heart, so it be in the presence of the keeper; and Ann Clark may come to you as well, for what I care.

At which the prisoner broke out and cried to his lordship not to use such words to him, and his lordship very angrily told him he deserved no tenderness at any man's hands for a cowardly butcherly murderer that had not the stomach to take the reward of his deeds: "and I hope to God," said he, "that she *will* be with you by day and by night till an end is made of you." Then the prisoner was removed, and, so far as I saw, he was in a swound, and the court broke up.

I cannot refrain from observing that the prisoner during all the time of the trial seemed to be more uneasy than is commonly the case even in capital causes: that, for example, he was looking narrowly among the people and often turning round very sharply, as if some person might be at his ear. It was also very noticeable at this trial what a silence the people kept, and further (though this might not be otherwise than natural in that season of the year) what a darkness and obscurity there was in the court room, lights being brought in not long after two o'clock in the day, and yet no fog in the town.

It was not without interest that I heard lately from some young men who had been giving a concert in the village I speak of, that a very cold reception was accorded to the song which has been mentioned in this narrative: "*Madame, will you walk?*" It came out in some talk they had next morning with some of the local people, that that song was regarded with an invincible repugnance—it was not so, they believed, at North Tawton—but here it was reckoned to be unlucky. However, why that view was taken no one had the shadow of an idea.

Robert Hichens

HOW LOVE CAME TO PROFESSOR GUILDEA

from TONGUES OF CONSCIENCE

Methuen, 1900

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1

Dull people often wondered how it came about that Father Murchison and Professor Frederic Guildea were intimate friends. The one was all faith, the other all scepticism. The nature of the Father was based on love. He viewed the world with an almost childlike tenderness above his long, black cassock; and his mild, yet perfectly fearless, blue eyes seemed always to be watching the goodness that exists in humanity, and rejoicing at what they saw. The Professor, on the other hand, had a hard face like a hatchet, tipped with an aggressive black goatee beard. His eyes were quick, piercing and irreverent. The lines about his small, thin-lipped mouth were almost cruel. His voice was harsh and dry, sometimes, when he grew energetic, almost soprano. It fired off words with a sharp and clipping utterance. His habitual manner was one of distrust and investigation. It was impossible to suppose that, in his busy life, he found any time for love, either of humanity in general or of an individual.

Yet his days were spent in scientific investigations which conferred immense benefits upon the world.

Both men were celibates. Father Murchison was a member of an Anglican order which forbade him to marry. Professor Guildea had a poor opinion of most things, but especially of women. He had formerly held a post as lecturer at Birmingham. But when his fame as a discoverer grew, he removed to London. There, at a lecture he gave in the East End, he first met Father Murchison. They spoke a few words. Perhaps the bright intelligence of the priest appealed to the man of science, who was inclined, as a rule, to regard the clergy with some contempt. Perhaps the transparent sincerity of this devotee, full of common sense, attracted him. As he was leaving the hall he abruptly asked the Father to call on him at his house in Hyde Park Place. And the Father, who seldom went into the West End, except to preach, accepted the invitation.

"When will you come?" said Guildea.

He was folding up the blue paper on which his notes were written in a tiny, clear hand. The leaves rustled drily in accompaniment to his sharp, dry voice.

"On Sunday week I am preaching in the evening at St. Saviour's, not far off," said the Father.

"I don't go to church."

"No," said the Father, without any accent of surprise or condemnation.

"Come to supper afterwards?"

"Thank you, I will."

"What time will you come?"

The Father smiled.

"As soon as I have finished my sermon. The service is at six-thirty."

"About eight then, I suppose. Don't make the sermon too long. My number in Hyde Park Place is 100. Good-night to you."

He snapped an elastic band round his papers and strode off without shaking hands.

On the appointed Sunday, Father Murchison preached to a densely crowded congregation at St. Saviour's. The subject of his sermon was sympathy, and the comparative uselessness of man in the world unless he can learn to love his neighbour as himself. The sermon was rather long, and when the preacher, in his flowing, black cloak, and his hard, round hat, with a straight brim over which hung the ends of a black cord, made his way towards the Professor's house, the hands of the illuminated clock disc at the Marble Arch pointed to twenty minutes past eight.

The Father hurried on, pushing his way through the crowd of standing soldiers, chattering women and giggling street boys in their Sunday best. It was a warm April night, and, when he reached number 100, Hyde Park Place, he found the Professor bareheaded on his doorstep, gazing out towards the Park railings, and enjoying the soft, moist air, in front of his lighted passage.

"Ha, a long sermon!" he exclaimed. "Come in."

"I fear it was," said the Father, obeying the invitation. "I am that dangerous thing—an extempore preacher."

"More attractive to speak without notes, if you can do it. Hang your hat and coat—oh, cloak—here. We'll have supper at once. This is the dining-room."

He opened a door on the right and they entered a long, narrow room, with a gold paper and a black ceiling, from which hung an electric lamp with a gold-coloured shade. In the room stood a small oval table with covers laid for two. The Professor rang the bell. Then he said:

"People seem to talk better at an oval table than at a square one."

"Really. Is that so?"

"Well, I've had precisely the same party twice, once at a square table, once at an oval table. The first dinner was a dull failure, the second a brilliant success. Sit down, won't you?"

"How d'you account for the difference?" said the Father, sitting down, and pulling the tail of his cassock well under him.

"H'm. I know how you'd account for it."

"Indeed. How then?"

"At an oval table, since there are no corners, the chain of human sympathy—the electric current, is much more complete. Eh! Let me give you some soup."

"Thank you."

The Father took it, and, as he did so, turned his beaming blue eyes on his host. Then he smiled.

"What!" he said, in his pleasant, light tenor voice. "You do go to church sometimes, then?"

"To-night is the first time for ages. And, mind you, I was tremendously bored."

The Father still smiled, and his blue eyes gently twinkled.

"Dear, dear!" he said, "what a pity!"

"But not by the sermon," Guildea added. "I don't pay a compliment. I state a fact. The sermon didn't bore me. If it had, I should have said so, or said nothing."

"And which would you have done?"

The Professor smiled almost genially.

"Don't know," he said. "What wine d'you drink?"

"None, thank you. I'm a teetotaller. In my profession and *milieu* it is necessary to be one. Yes, I will have some soda water. I think you would have done the first."

"Very likely, and very wrongly. You wouldn't have minded much."

"I don't think I should."

They were intimate already. The Father felt most pleasantly at home under the black ceiling. He drank some soda water and seemed to enjoy it more than the Professor enjoyed his claret.

"You smile at the theory of the chain of human sympathy, I see," said the Father. "Then what is your explanation of the failure of your square party with corners, the success of your oval party without them?"

"Probably on the first occasion the wit of the assembly had a chill on his liver, while on the second he was in perfect health. Yet, you see, I stick to the oval table."

"And that means—"

"Very little. By the way, your omission of any allusion to the notorious part liver plays in love was a serious one to-night."

"Your omission of any desire for close human sympathy in your life is a more serious one."

"How can you be sure I have no such desire?"

"I divine it. Your look, your manner, tell me it is so. You were disagreeing with my sermon all the time I was preaching. Weren't you?"

"Part of the time."

The servant changed the plates. He was a middle-aged, blond, thin man, with a stony white face, pale, prominent eyes, and an accomplished manner of service. When he had left the room the Professor continued.

"Your remarks interested me, but I thought them exaggerated."

"For instance?"

"Let me play the egoist for a moment. I spend most of my time in hard work, very hard work. The results of this work, you will allow, benefit humanity."

"Enormously," assented the Father, thinking of more than one of Guildea's discoveries.

"And the benefit conferred by this work, undertaken merely for its own sake,

is just as great as if it were undertaken because I loved my fellow man, and sentimentally desired to see him more comfortable than he is at present. I'm as useful precisely in my present condition of—in my present non-affectional condition—as I should be if I were as full of gush as the sentimentalists who want to get murderers out of prison, or to put a premium on tyranny—like Tolstoi—by preventing the punishment of tyrants."

"One may do great harm with affection; great good without it. Yes, that is true. Even *le bon motif* is not everything, I know. Still I contend that, given your powers, you would be far more useful in the world with sympathy, affection for your kind, added to them than as you are. I believe even that you would do still more splendid work."

The Professor poured himself out another glass of claret.

"You noticed my butler?" he said.

"I did."

"He's a perfect servant. He makes me perfectly comfortable. Yet he has no feeling of liking for me. I treat him civilly. I pay him well. But I never think about him, or concern myself with him as a human being. I know nothing of his character except what I read of it in his last master's letter. There are, you may say, no truly human relations between us. You would affirm that his work would be better done if I had made him personally like me as man—of any class—can like man—of any other class?"

"I should, decidedly."

"I contend that he couldn't do his work better than he does it at present."

"But if any crisis occurred?"

"What?"

"Any crisis, change in your condition. If you needed his help, not only as a man and a butler, but as a man and a brother? He'd fail you then, probably. You would never get from your servant that finest service which can only be prompted by an honest affection."

"You have finished?"

"Quite."

"Let us go upstairs then. Yes, those are good prints. I picked them up in Birmingham when I was living there. This is my workroom."

They came to a double room lined entirely with books, and brilliantly, rather hardly, lit by electricity. The windows at one end looked on to the Park, at the other on to the garden of a neighbouring house. The door by which they entered was concealed from the inner and smaller room by the jutting wall of the outer room, in which stood a huge writing-table loaded with letters, pamphlets and manuscripts. Between the two windows of the inner room was a cage in which a large, grey parrot was clambering, using both beak and claws to assist him in his slow and meditative peregrinations.

"You have a pet," said the Father, surprised.

"I possess a parrot," the Professor answered drily. "I got him for a purpose when I was making a study of the imitative powers of birds, and I have never got rid of him. A cigar?"

"Thank you."

They sat down. Father Murchison glanced at the parrot. It had paused in its journey, and, clinging to the bars of its cage, was regarding them with attentive round eyes that looked deliberately intelligent, but by no means sympathetic. He looked away from it to Guildea, who was smoking, with his head thrown back, his sharp, pointed chin, on which the small black beard bristled, upturned. He was moving his under lip up and down rapidly. This action caused the beard to stir and look peculiarly aggressive. The Father suddenly chuckled softly.

"Why's that?" cried Guildea, letting his chin drop down on his breast and looking at his guest sharply.

"I was thinking it would have to be a crisis indeed that could make you cling to your butler's affection for assistance."

Guildea smiled too.

"You're right. It would. Here he comes."

The man entered with coffee. He offered it gently, and retired like a shadow retreating on a wall.

"Splendid, inhuman fellow," remarked Guildea.

"I prefer the East End lad who does my errands in Bird Street," said the Father. "I know all his worries. He knows some of mine. We are friends. He's more noisy than your man. He even breathes hard when he is especially solicitous, but he would do more for me than put the coals on my fire, or black my square-toed boots."

"Men are differently made. To me the watchful eye of affection would be abominable."

"What about that bird?"

The Father pointed to the parrot. It had got up on its perch and, with one foot uplifted in an impressive, almost benedictory, manner, was gazing steadily at the Professor.

"That's the watchful eye of imitation, with a mind at the back of it, desirous of reproducing the peculiarities of others. No, I thought your sermon to-night very fresh, very clever. But I have no wish for affection. Reasonable liking, of course, one desires"—he tugged sharply at his beard, as if to warn himself against sentimentality—"but anything more would be most irksome, and would push me, I feel sure, towards cruelty. It would also hamper one's work."

"I don't think so."

"The sort of work I do. I shall continue to benefit the world without loving it, and it will continue to accept the benefits without loving me. That's all as it should be."

He drank his coffee. Then he added rather aggressively:

"I have neither time nor inclination for sentimentality."

When Guildea let Father Murchison out, he followed the Father on to the doorstep and stood there for a moment. The Father glanced across the damp road into the Park.

"I see you've got a gate just opposite you," he said idly.

"Yes. I often slip across for a stroll to clear my brain. Good-night to you. Come again some day."

"With pleasure. Good-night."

The Priest strode away, leaving Guildea standing on the step.

Father Murchison came many times again to number 100, Hyde Park Place. He had a feeling of liking for most men and women whom he knew, and of tenderness for all, whether he knew them or not, but he grew to have a special sentiment towards Guildea. Strangely enough, it was a sentiment of pity. He pitied this hard-working, eminently successful man of big brain and bold heart, who never seemed depressed, who never wanted assistance, who never complained of the twisted skein of life or faltered in his progress along its way. The Father pitied Guildea, in fact, because Guildea wanted so little. He had told him so, for the intercourse of the two men, from the beginning, had been singularly frank.

One evening, when they were talking together, the Father happened to speak of one of the oddities of life, the fact that those who do not want things often get them, while those who seek them vehemently are disappointed in their search.

"Then I ought to have affection poured upon me," said Guildea smiling rather grimly. "For I hate it."

"Perhaps some day you will."

"I hope not, most sincerely."

Father Murchison said nothing for a moment. He was drawing together the ends of the broad band round his cassock. When he spoke he seemed to be answering someone.

"Yes," he said slowly, "yes, that *is* my feeling—pity."

"For whom?" said the Professor.

Then, suddenly, he understood. He did not say that he understood, but Father Murchison felt, and saw, that it was quite unnecessary to answer his friend's question. So Guildea, strangely enough, found himself closely acquainted with a man—his opposite in all ways—who pitied him.

The fact that he did not mind this, and scarcely ever thought about it, shows perhaps as clearly as anything could, the peculiar indifference of his nature.

2

One Autumn evening, a year and a half after Father Murchison and the Professor had first met, the Father called in Hyde Park Place and enquired of the blond and stony butler—his name was Pitting—whether his master was at home.

"Yes, sir," replied Pitting. "Will you please come this way?"

He moved noiselessly up the rather narrow stairs, followed by the Father, tenderly opened the library door, and in his soft, cold voice, announced:

"Father Murchison."

Guildea was sitting in an armchair, before a small fire. His thin, long-fingered

hands lay outstretched upon his knees, his head was sunk down on his chest. He appeared to be pondering deeply. Pitting very slightly raised his voice.

"Father Murchison to see you, sir," he repeated.

The Professor jumped up rather suddenly and turned sharply round as the Father came in.

"Oh," he said. "It's you, is it? Glad to see you. Come to the fire."

The Father glanced at him and thought him looking unusually fatigued.

"You don't look well to-night," the Father said.

"No?"

"You must be working too hard. That lecture you are going to give in Paris is bothering you?"

"Not a bit. It's all arranged. I could deliver it to you at this moment verbatim. Well, sit down."

The Father did so, and Guildea sank once more into his chair and stared hard into the fire without another word. He seemed to be thinking profoundly. His friend did not interrupt him, but quietly lit a pipe and began to smoke reflectively. The eyes of Guildea were fixed upon the fire. The Father glanced about the room, at the walls of soberly bound books, at the crowded writing-table, at the windows, before which hung heavy, dark-blue curtains of old brocade, at the cage, which stood between them. A green baize covering was thrown over it. The Father wondered why. He had never seen Napoleon—so the parrot was named—covered up at night before. While he was looking at the baize Guildea suddenly jerked up his head, and, taking his hands from his knees and clasping them, said abruptly:

"D'you think I'm an attractive man?"

Father Murchison jumped. Such a question coming from such a man astounded him.

"Bless me!" he ejaculated. "What makes you ask? Do you mean attractive to the opposite sex?"

"That's what I don't know," said the Professor gloomily, and staring again into the fire. "That's what I don't know."

The Father grew more astonished.

"Don't know!" he exclaimed.

And he laid down his pipe.

"Let's say—d'you think I'm attractive, that there's anything about me which might draw a—a human being, or an animal irresistibly to me?"

"Whether you desired it or not?"

"Exactly—or—no, let us say definitely—if I did not desire it."

Father Murchison pursed up his rather full, cherubic lips, and little wrinkles appeared about the corners of his blue eyes.

"There might be, of course," he said, after a pause. "Human nature is weak, engagingly weak, Guildea. And you're inclined to flout it. I could understand a certain class of lady—the lion-hunting, the intellectual lady, seeking you. Your reputation, your great name——"

"Yes, yes," Guildea interrupted, rather irritably—"I know all that, I know."

He twisted his long hands together, bending the palms outwards till his thin, pointed fingers cracked. His forehead was wrinkled in a frown.

"I imagine," he said—he stopped and coughed drily, almost shrilly—"I imagine it would be very disagreeable to be liked, to be run after—that is the usual expression, isn't it—by anything one objected to."

And now he half turned in his chair, crossed his legs one over the other, and looked at his guest with an unusual, almost piercing interrogation.

"Anything?" said the Father.

"Well—well, anyone. I imagine nothing could be more unpleasant."

"To you—no," answered the Father. "But—forgive me, Guildea, I cannot conceive your permitting such intrusion. You don't encourage adoration."

Guildea nodded his head gloomily.

"I don't," he said, "I don't. That's just it. That's the curious part of it, that I—"

He broke off deliberately, got up and stretched.

"I'll have a pipe, too," he said.

He went over to the mantelpiece, got his pipe, filled it and lighted it. As he held the match to the tobacco, bending forward with an enquiring expression, his eyes fell upon the green baize that covered Napoleon's cage. He threw the match into the grate, and puffed at the pipe as he walked forward to the cage. When he reached it he put out his hand, took hold of the baize and began to pull it away. Then suddenly he pushed it back over the cage.

"No," he said, as if to himself, "no."

He returned rather hastily to the fire and threw himself once more into his armchair.

"You're wondering," he said to Father Murchison. "So am I. I don't know at all what to make of it. I'll just tell you the facts and you must tell me what you think of them. The night before last, after a day of hard work—but no harder than usual—I went to the front door to get a breath of air. You know I often do that."

"Yes, I found you on the doorstep when I first came here."

"Just so. I didn't put on hat or coat. I just stood on the step as I was. My mind, I remember, was still full of my work. It was rather a dark night, not very dark. The hour was about eleven, or a quarter past. I was staring at the Park, and presently I found that my eyes were directed towards somebody who was sitting, back to me, on one of the benches. I saw the person—if it was a person—through the railings."

"If it was a person!" said the Father. "What do you mean by that?"

"Wait a minute. I say that because it was too dark for me to know. I merely saw some blackish object on the bench, rising into view above the level of the back of the seat. I couldn't say it was man, woman or child. But something there was, and I found that I was looking at it."

"I understand."

"Gradually, I also found that my thoughts were becoming fixed upon this

thing or person. I began to wonder, first, what it was doing there; next, what it was thinking; lastly, what it was like."

"Some poor creature without a home, I suppose," said the Father.

"I said that to myself. Still, I was taken with an extraordinary interest about this object, so great an interest that I got my hat and crossed the road to go into the Park. As you know, there's an entrance almost opposite to my house. Well, Murchison, I crossed the road, passed through the gate in the railings, went up to the seat, and found that there was—nothing on it."

"Were you looking at it as you walked?"

"Part of the time. But I removed my eyes from it just as I passed through the gate, because there was a row going on a little way off, and I turned for an instant in that direction. When I saw that the seat was vacant I was seized by a most absurd sensation of disappointment, almost of anger. I stopped and looked about me to see if anything was moving away, but I could see nothing. It was a cold night and misty, and there were few people about. Feeling, as I say, foolishly and unnaturally disappointed, I retraced my steps to this house. When I got here I discovered that during my short absence I had left the hall door open—half open."

"Rather imprudent in London."

"Yes. I had no idea, of course, that I had done so, till I got back. However, I was only away three minutes or so."

"Yes."

"It was not likely that anybody had gone in."

"I suppose not."

"Was it?"

"Why do you ask me that, Guildea?"

"Well, well!"

"Besides, if anybody had gone in, on your return you'd have caught him, surely."

Guildea coughed again. The Father, surprised, could not fail to recognise that he was nervous and that his nervousness was affecting him physically.

"I must have caught cold that night," he said, as if he had read his friend's thought and hastened to contradict it. Then he went on:

"I entered the hall, or passage, rather."

He paused again. His uneasiness was becoming very apparent.

"And you did catch somebody?" said the Father.

Guildea cleared his throat.

"That's just it," he said, "now we come to it. I'm not imaginative, as you know."

"You certainly are not."

"No, but hardly had I stepped into the passage before I felt certain that somebody had got into the house during my absence. I felt convinced of it, and not only that, I also felt convinced that the intruder was the very person I had dimly seen sitting upon the seat in the Park. What d'you say to that?"

"I begin to think you are imaginative."

"H'm! It seemed to me that the person—the occupant of the seat—and I, had simultaneously formed the project of interviewing each other, had simultaneously set out to put that project into execution. I became so certain of this that I walked hastily upstairs into this room, expecting to find the visitor awaiting me. But there was no one. I then came down again and went into the dining-room. No one. I was actually astonished. Isn't that odd?"

"Very," said the Father, quite gravely.

The Professor's chill and gloomy manner, and uncomfortable, constrained appearance kept away the humour that might well have lurked round the steps of such a discourse.

"I went upstairs again," he continued, "sat down and thought the matter over. I resolved to forget it, and took up a book. I might perhaps have been able to read, but suddenly I thought I noticed—"

He stopped abruptly. Father Murchison observed that he was staring towards the green baize that covered the parrot's cage.

"But that's nothing," he said. "Enough that I couldn't read. I resolved to explore the house. You know how small it is, how easily one can go all over it. I went all over it. I went into every room without exception. To the servants, who were having supper, I made some excuse. They were surprised at my advent, no doubt."

"And Pitting?"

"Oh, he got up politely when I came in, stood while I was there, but never said a word. I muttered 'don't disturb yourselves' or something of the sort, and came out. Murchison, I found nobody new in the house—yet I returned to this room entirely convinced that somebody had entered while I was in the Park."

"And gone out again before you came back?"

"No, had stayed, and was still in the house."

"But, my dear Guildea," began the Father, now in great astonishment. "Surely—"

"I know what you want to say—what I should want to say in your place. Now, do wait. I am also convinced that this visitor has not left the house and is at this moment in it."

He spoke with evident sincerity, with extreme gravity. Father Murchison looked him full in the face, and met his quick, keen eyes.

"No," he said, as if in reply to an uttered question: "I'm perfectly sane, I assure you. The whole matter seems almost as incredible to me as it must to you. But, as you know, I never quarrel with facts, however strange. I merely try to examine into them thoroughly. I have already consulted a doctor and been pronounced in perfect bodily health."

He paused, as if expecting the Father to say something.

"Go on, Guildea," he said, "you haven't finished."

"No. I felt that night positive that somebody had entered the house, and remained in it, and my conviction grew. I went to bed as usual, and, contrary to my expectation, slept as well as I generally do. Yet directly I woke up yesterday morning I knew that my household had been increased by one."

"May I interrupt you for one moment? How did you know it?"

"By my mental sensation. I can only say that I was perfectly conscious of a new presence within my house, close to me."

"How very strange," said the Father. "And you feel absolutely certain that you are not overworked? Your brain does not feel tired? Your head is quite clear?"

"Quite. I was never better. When I came down to breakfast that morning I looked sharply into Pitting's face. He was as coldly placid and inexpressive as usual. It was evident to me that his mind was in no way distressed. After breakfast I sat down to work, all the time ceaselessly conscious of the fact of this intruder upon my privacy. Nevertheless, I laboured for several hours, waiting for any development that might occur to clear away the mysterious obscurity of this event. I lunched. About half-past two I was obliged to go out to attend a lecture. I therefore took my coat and hat, opened my door, and stepped on to the pavement. I was instantly aware that I was no longer intruded upon, and this although I was now in the street, surrounded by people. Consequently, I felt certain that the thing in my house must be thinking of me, perhaps even spying upon me."

"Wait a moment," interrupted the Father. "What was your sensation? Was it one of fear?"

"Oh, dear no. I was entirely puzzled—as I am now—and keenly interested, but not in any way alarmed. I delivered my lecture with my usual ease and returned home in the evening. On entering the house again I was perfectly conscious that the intruder was still there. Last night I dined alone and spent the hours after dinner in reading a scientific work in which I was deeply interested. While I read, however, I never for one moment lost the knowledge that some mind—very attentive to me—was within hail of mine. I will say more than this—the sensation constantly increased, and, by the time I got up to go to bed, I had come to a very strange conclusion."

"What? What was it?"

"That whoever—or whatever—had entered my house during my short absence in the Park was more than interested in me."

"More than interested in you?"

"Was fond, or was becoming fond, of me."

"Oh!" exclaimed the Father. "Now I understand why you asked me just now whether I thought there was anything about you that might draw a human being or an animal irresistibly to you."

"Precisely. Since I came to this conclusion, Murchison, I will confess that my feeling of strong curiosity has become tinged with another feeling."

"Of fear?"

"No, of dislike, or irritation. No—not fear, not fear."

As Guildea repeated unnecessarily this asseveration he looked again towards the parrot's cage.

"What is there to be afraid of in such a matter?" he added. "I am not a child to tremble before bogies."

In saying the last words he raised his voice sharply; then he walked quickly to

the cage, and, with an abrupt movement, pulled the baize covering from it. Napoleon was disclosed, apparently dozing upon his perch with his head held slightly on one side. As the light reached him, he moved, ruffled the feathers about his neck, blinked his eyes, and began slowly to sidle to and fro, thrusting his head forward and drawing it back with an air of complacent, though rather unmeaning, energy. Guildea stood by the cage, looking at him closely, and indeed with an attention that was so intense as to be remarkable, almost unnatural.

"How absurd these birds are!" he said at length, coming back to the fire.

"You have no more to tell me?" asked the Father.

"No. I am still aware of the presence of something in my house. I am still conscious of its close attention to me. I am still irritated, seriously annoyed—I confess it—by that attention."

"You say you are aware of the presence of something at this moment?"

"At this moment—yes."

"Do you mean in this room, with us, now?"

"I should say so—at any rate, quite near us."

Again he glanced quickly, almost suspiciously, towards the cage of the parrot. The bird was sitting still on its perch now. Its head was bent down and cocked sideways, and it appeared to be listening attentively to something.

"That bird will have the intonations of my voice more correctly than ever by to-morrow morning," said the Father, watching Guildea closely with his mild blue eyes. "And it has always imitated me very cleverly."

The Professor started slightly.

"Yes," he said. "Yes, no doubt. Well, what do you make of this affair?"

"Nothing at all. It is absolutely inexplicable. I can speak quite frankly to you, I feel sure."

"Of course. That's why I have told you the whole thing."

"I think you must be over-worked, over-strained, without knowing it."

"And that the doctor was mistaken when he said I was all right?"

"Yes."

Guildea knocked his pipe out against the chimney piece.

"It may be so," he said, "I will not be so unreasonable as to deny the possibility, although I feel as well as I ever did in my life. What do you advise then?"

"A week of complete rest away from London, in good air."

"The usual prescription. I'll take it. I'll go to-morrow to Westgate and leave Napoleon to keep house in my absence."

For some reason, which he could not explain to himself, the pleasure which Father Murchison felt in hearing the first part of his friend's final remark was lessened, was almost destroyed, by the last sentence.

He walked towards the City that night, deep in thought, remembering and carefully considering the first interview he had with Guildea in the latter's house a year and a half before.

On the following morning Guildea left London.

3

Father Murchison was so busy a man that he had little time for brooding over the affairs of others. During Guildea's week at the sea, however, the Father thought about him a great deal, with much wonder and some dismay. The dismay was soon banished, for the mild-eyed priest was quick to discern weakness in himself, quicker still to drive it forth as a most undesirable inmate of the soul. But the wonder remained. It was destined to a crescendo. Guildea had left London on a Thursday. On a Thursday he returned, having previously sent a note to Father Murchison to mention that he was leaving Westgate at a certain time. When his train ran into Victoria Station, at five o'clock in the evening, he was surprised to see the cloaked figure of his friend standing upon the grey platform behind a line of porters.

"What, Murchison!" he said. "You here! Have you seceded from your order that you are taking this holiday?"

They shook hands.

"No," said the Father. "It happened that I had to be in this neighbourhood to-day, visiting a sick person. So I thought I would meet you."

"And see if I were still a sick person, eh?"

The Professor glanced at him kindly, but with a dry little laugh.

"Are you?" replied the Father gently, looking at him with interest. "No, I think not. You appear very well."

The sea air had, in fact, put some brownish red into Guildea's always thin cheeks. His keen eyes were shining with life and energy, and he walked forward in his loose grey suit and fluttering overcoat with a vigour that was noticeable, carrying easily in his left hand his well-filled Gladstone bag.

The Father felt completely reassured.

"I never saw you look better," he said.

"I never was better. Have you an hour to spare?"

"Two."

"Good. I'll send my bag up by cab, and we'll walk across the Park to my house and have a cup of tea there. What d'you say?"

"I shall enjoy it."

They walked out of the station yard, past the flower girls and newspaper sellers towards Grosvenor Place.

"And you have had a pleasant time?" the Father said.

"Pleasant enough, and lonely. I left my companion behind me in the passage at number 100, you know."

"And you'll not find him there now, I feel sure."

"H'm!" ejaculated Guildea. "What a precious weakling you think me, Murchison."

As he spoke he strode forward more quickly, as if moved to emphasise his sensation of bodily vigour.

"A weakling—no. But anyone who uses his brain as persistently as you do yours must require an occasional holiday."

"And I required one very badly, eh?"

"You required one, I believe."

"Well, I've had it. And now we'll see."

The evening was closing in rapidly. They crossed the road at Hyde Park Corner, and entered the Park, in which were a number of people going home from work; men in corduroy trousers, caked with dried mud, and carrying tin cans slung over their shoulders, and flat panniers, in which lay their tools. Some of the younger ones talked loudly or whistled shrilly as they walked.

"Until the evening," murmured Father Murchison to himself.

"What?" asked Guildea.

"I was only quoting the last words of the text, which seems written upon life, especially upon the life of pleasure: 'Man goeth forth to his work, and to his labour.'"

"Ah, those fellows are not half bad fellows to have in an audience. There were a lot of them at the lecture I gave when I first met you, I remember. One of them tried to heckle me. He had a red beard. Chaps with red beards are always hecklers. I laid him low on that occasion. Well, Murchison, and now we're going to see."

"What?"

"Whether my companion has departed."

"Tell me—do you feel any expectation of—well—of again thinking something is there?"

"How carefully you choose language. No, I merely wonder."

"You have no apprehension?"

"Not a scrap. But I confess to feeling curious."

"Then the sea air hasn't taught you to recognise that the whole thing came from overstrain."

"No," said Guildea, very drily.

He walked on in silence for a minute. Then he added:

"You thought it would?"

"I certainly thought it might."

"Make me realise that I had a sickly, morbid, rotten imagination—eh? Come now, Murchison, why not say frankly that you packed me off to Westgate to get rid of what you considered an acute form of hysteria?"

The Father was quite unmoved by this attack.

"Come now, Guildea," he retorted, "what did you expect me to think? I saw no indication of hysteria in you. I never have. One would suppose you the last man likely to have such a malady. But which is more natural—for me to believe in your hysteria or in the truth of such a story as you told me?"

"You have me there. No, I mustn't complain. Well, there's no hysteria about me now, at any rate."

"And no stranger in your house, I hope."

Father Murchison spoke the last words with earnest gravity, dropping the half-bantering tone—which they had both assumed.

"You take the matter very seriously, I believe," said Guildea, also speaking more gravely.

"How else can I take it? You wouldn't have me laugh at it when you tell it me seriously?"

"No. If we find my visitor still in the house, I may even call upon you to exorcise it. But first I must do one thing."

"And that is?"

"Prove to you, as well as to myself, that it is still there."

"That might be difficult," said the Father, considerably surprised by Guildea's matter-of-fact tone.

"I don't know. If it has remained in my house I think I can find a means. And I shall not be at all surprised if it is still there—despite the Westgate air."

In saying the last words the Professor relapsed into his former tone of dry chaff. The Father could not quite make up his mind whether Guildea was feeling unusually grave or unusually gay. As the two men drew near to Hyde Park Place their conversation died away and they walked forward silently in the gathering darkness.

"Here we are!" said Guildea at last.

He thrust his key into the door, opened it and let Father Murchison into the passage, following him closely, and banging the door.

"Here we are!" he repeated in a louder voice.

The electric light was turned on in anticipation of his arrival. He stood still and looked round.

"We'll have some tea at once," he said. "Ah, Pitting!"

The pale butler, who had heard the door bang, moved gently forward from the top of the stairs that led to the kitchen, greeted his master respectfully, took his coat and Father Murchison's cloak, and hung them on two pegs against the wall.

"All's right, Pitting? All's as usual?" said Guildea.

"Quite so, sir."

"Bring us up some tea to the library."

"Yes, sir."

Pitting retreated. Guildea waited till he had disappeared, then opened the dining-room door, put his head into the room and kept it there for a moment, standing perfectly still. Presently he drew back into the passage, shut the door, and said:

"Let's go upstairs."

Father Murchison looked at him enquiringly, but made no remark. They ascended the stairs and came into the library. Guildea glanced rather sharply round. A fire was burning on the hearth. The blue curtains were drawn. The bright gleam of the strong electric light fell on the long rows of books, on the writing-table—very orderly in consequence of Guildea's holiday—and on the uncovered cage of the parrot. Guildea went up to the cage. Napoleon was sitting humped up on his perch with his feathers ruffled. His long toes, which looked as

if they were covered with crocodile skin, clung to the bar. His round and blinking eyes were filmy, like old eyes. Guildea stared at the bird very hard, and then clucked with his tongue against his teeth. Napoleon shook himself, lifted one foot, extended his toes, sidled along the perch to the bars nearest to the Professor and thrust his head against them. Guildea scratched it with his forefinger two or three times, still gazing attentively at the parrot; then he returned to the fire just as Pitting entered with the tea-tray.

Father Murchison was already sitting in an armchair on one side of the fire. Guildea took another chair and began to pour out tea, as Pitting left the room, closing the door gently behind him. The Father sipped his tea, found it hot and set the cup down on a little table at his side.

"You're fond of that parrot, aren't you?" he asked his friend.

"Not particularly. It's interesting to study sometimes. The parrot mind and nature are peculiar."

"How long have you had him?"

"About four years. I nearly got rid of him just before I made your acquaintance. I'm very glad now I kept him."

"Are you? Why is that?"

"I shall probably tell you in a day or two."

The Father took his cup again. He did not press Guildea for an immediate explanation, but when they had both finished their tea he said:

"Well, has the sea-air had the desired effect?"

"No," said Guildea.

The Father brushed some crumbs from the front of his cassock and sat up higher in his chair.

"Your visitor is still here?" he asked, and his blue eyes became almost ungentle and piercing as he gazed at his friend.

"Yes," answered Guildea, calmly.

"How do you know it, when did you know it—when you looked into the dining-room just now?"

"No. Not until I came into this room. It welcomed me here."

"Welcomed you! In what way?"

"Simply by being here, by making me feel that it is here, as I might feel that a man was if I came into the room when it was dark."

He spoke quietly, with perfect composure in his usual dry manner.

"Very well," the Father said, "I shall not try to contend against your sensation, or to explain it away. Naturally, I am in amazement."

"So am I. Never has anything in my life surprised me so much. Murchison, of course I cannot expect you to believe more than that I honestly suppose—imagine, if you like—that there is some intruder here, of what kind I am totally unaware. I cannot expect you to believe that there really is anything. If you were in my place, I in yours, I should certainly consider you the victim of some nervous delusion. I could not do otherwise. But—wait. Don't condemn me as a hysteria patient, or as a madman, for two or three days. I feel convinced that—unless I am

indeed unwell, a mental invalid, which I don't think is possible—I shall be able very shortly to give you some proof that there is a newcomer in my house."

"You don't tell me what kind of proof?"

"Not yet. Things must go a little farther first. But, perhaps even to-morrow I may be able to explain myself more fully. In the meanwhile, I'll say this, that if, eventually, I can't bring any kind of proof that I'm not dreaming, I'll let you take me to any doctor you like, and I'll resolutely try to adopt your present view —that I'm suffering from an absurd delusion. That is your view, of course?"

Father Murchison was silent for a moment. Then he said, rather doubtfully:

"It ought to be."

"But isn't it?" asked Guildea, surprised.

"Well, you know, your manner is enormously convincing. Still, of course, I doubt. How can I do otherwise? The whole thing must be fancy."

The Father spoke as if he were trying to recoil from a mental position he was being forced to take up.

"It must be fancy," he repeated.

"I'll convince you by more than my manner, or I'll not try to convince you at all," said Guildea.

When they parted that evening, he said:

"I'll write to you in a day or two probably. I think the proof I am going to give you has been accumulating during my absence. But I shall soon know."

Father Murchison was extremely puzzled as he sat on the top of the omnibus going homeward.

4

In two days' time he received a note from Guildea asking him to call, if possible, the same evening. This he was unable to do as he had an engagement to fulfil at some East End gathering. The following day was Sunday. He wrote saying he would come on the Monday, and got a wire shortly afterwards: "Yes, Monday come to dinner seven-thirty Guildea." At half-past seven he stood on the doorstep of number 100.

Pitting let him in.

"Is the Professor quite well, Pitting?" the Father enquired as he took off his cloak.

"I believe so, sir. He has not made any complaint," the butler formally replied. "Will you come upstairs, sir?"

Guildea met them at the door of the library. He was very pale and sombre, and shook hands carelessly with his friend.

"Give us dinner," he said to Pitting.

As the butler retired, Guildea shut the door rather cautiously. Father Murchison had never before seen him look so disturbed.

"You're worried, Guildea," the Father said. "Seriously worried."

"Yes, I am. This business is beginning to tell on me a good deal."

"Your belief in the presence of something here continues then?"

"Oh, dear, yes. There's no sort of doubt about the matter. The night I went across the road into the Park something got into the house, though what the devil it is I can't yet find out. But now, before we go down to dinner, I'll just tell you something about that proof I promised you. You remember?"

"Naturally."

"Can't you imagine what it might be?"

Father Murchison moved his head to express a negative reply.

"Look about the room," said Guildea. "What do you see?"

The Father glanced round the room, slowly and carefully.

"Nothing unusual. You do not mean to tell me there is any appearance of—"

"Oh, no, no, there's no conventional, white-robed, cloud-like figure. Bless my soul, no! I haven't fallen so low as that."

He spoke with considerable irritation.

"Look again."

Father Murchison looked at him, turned in the direction of his fixed eyes and saw the grey parrot clambering in its cage, slowly and persistently.

"What?" he said, quickly. "Will the proof come from there?"

The Professor nodded.

"I believe so," he said. "Now let's go down to dinner. I want some food badly."

They descended to the dining-room. While they ate and Pitting waited upon them, the Professor talked about birds, their habits, their curiosities, their fears and their powers of imitation. He had evidently studied this subject with the thoroughness that was characteristic of him in all that he did.

"Parrots," he said presently, "are extraordinarily observant. It is a pity that their means of reproducing what they see are so limited. If it were not so, I have little doubt that their echo of gesture would be as remarkable as their echo of voice often is."

"But hands are missing."

"Yes. They do many things with their heads, however. I once knew an old woman near Goring on the Thames. She was afflicted with the palsy. She held her head perpetually sideways and it trembled, moving from right to left. Her sailor son brought her home a parrot from one of his voyages. It used to reproduce the old woman's palsied movement of the head exactly. Those grey parrots are always on the watch."

Guildea said the last sentence slowly and deliberately, glancing sharply over his wine at Father Murchison, and, when he had spoken it, a sudden light of comprehension dawned in the Priest's mind. He opened his lips to make a swift remark. Guildea turned his bright eyes towards Pitting, who at the moment was tenderly bearing a cheese meringue from the lift that connected the dining-room with the lower regions. The Father closed his lips again. But presently, when the butler had placed some apples on the table, had meticulously arranged the decanters, brushed away the crumbs and evaporated, he said, quickly:

"I begin to understand. You think Napoleon is aware of the intruder?"

"I know it. He has been watching my visitant ever since the night of that visitant's arrival."

Another flash of light came to the Priest.

"That was why you covered him with green baize one evening?"

"Exactly. An act of cowardice. His behaviour was beginning to grate upon my nerves."

Guildea pursed up his thin lips and drew his brows down, giving to his face a look of sudden pain.

"But now I intend to follow his investigations," he added, straightening his features. "The week I wasted at Westgate was not wasted by him in London, I can assure you. Have an apple."

"No, thank you; no, thank you."

The Father repeated the words without knowing that he did so. Guildea pushed away his glass.

"Let us come upstairs, then."

"No, thank you," reiterated the Father.

"Eh?"

"What am I saying?" exclaimed the Father, getting up. "I was thinking over this extraordinary affair."

"Ah, you're beginning to forget the hysteria theory?"

They walked out into the passage.

"Well, you are so very practical about the whole matter."

"Why not? Here's something very strange and abnormal come into my life. What should I do but investigate it closely and calmly?"

"What, indeed?"

The Father began to feel rather bewildered, under a sort of compulsion which seemed laid upon him to give earnest attention to a matter that ought to strike him—so he felt—as entirely absurd. When they came into the library his eyes immediately turned, with profound curiosity, towards the parrot's cage. A slight smile curled the Professor's lips. He recognised the effect he was producing upon his friend. The Father saw the smile.

"Oh, I'm not won over yet," he said in answer to it.

"I know. Perhaps you may be before the evening is over. Here comes the coffee. After we have drunk it we'll proceed to our experiment. Leave the coffee, Pitting, and don't disturb us again."

"No, sir."

"I won't have it black to-night," said the Father, "plenty of milk, please. I don't want my nerves played upon."

"Suppose we don't take coffee at all?" said Guildea. "If we do, you may trot out the theory that we are not in a perfectly normal condition. I know you, Murchison, devout Priest and devout sceptic."

The Father laughed and pushed away his cup.

"Very well, then. No coffee."

"One cigarette, and then to business."

The grey blue smoke curled up.

"What are we going to do?" said the Father.

He was sitting bolt upright as if ready for action. Indeed there was no suggestion of repose in the attitudes of either of the men.

"Hide ourselves, and watch Napoleon. By the way—that reminds me."

He got up, went to a corner of the room, picked up a piece of green baize and threw it over the cage.

"I'll pull that off when we are hidden."

"And tell me first if you have had any manifestation of this supposed presence during the last few days?"

"Merely an increasingly intense sensation of something here, perpetually watching me, perpetually attending to all my doings."

"Do you feel that it follows you about?"

"Not always. It was in this room when you arrived. It is here now—I feel. But, in going down to dinner, we seemed to get away from it. The conclusion is that it remained here. Don't let us talk about it just now."

They spoke of other things till their cigarettes were finished. Then, as they threw away the smouldering ends, Guildea said:

"Now, Murchison, for the sake of this experiment, I suggest that we should conceal ourselves behind the curtains on either side of the cage, so that the bird's attention may not be drawn towards us and so distracted from that which we want to know more about. I will pull away the green baize when we are hidden. Keep perfectly still, watch the bird's proceedings, and tell me afterwards how you feel about them, how you explain them. Tread softly."

The Father obeyed, and they stole towards the curtains that fell before the two windows. The Father concealed himself behind those on the left of the cage, the Professor behind those on the right. The latter, as soon as they were hidden, stretched out his arm, drew the baize down from the cage, and let if fall on the floor.

The parrot, which had evidently fallen asleep in the warm darkness, moved on its perch as the light shone upon it, ruffled the feathers round its throat, and lifted first one foot and then the other. It turned its head round on its supple, and apparently elastic, neck, and, diving its beak into the down upon its back, made some searching investigations with, as it seemed, a satisfactory result, for it soon lifted its head again, glanced around its cage, and began to address itself to a nut which had been fixed between the bars for its refreshment. With its curved beak it felt and tapped the nut, at first gently, then with severity. Finally it plucked the nut from the bars, seized it with its rough, grey toes, and, holding it down firmly on the perch, cracked it and pecked out its contents, scattering some on the floor of the cage and letting the fractured shell fall into the china bath that was fixed against the bars. This accomplished, the bird paused meditatively, extended one leg backwards, and went through an elaborate process of wing-stretching that made it look as if it were lopsided and deformed. With its head reversed, it again applied itself to a subtle and exhaustive search among the feathers of its wing. This time its investigation seemed interminable, and Father Murchison had time to realise the absurdity of the whole position, and to wonder

why he had lent himself to it. Yet he did not find his sense of humour laughing at it. On the contrary, he was smitten by a sudden gust of horror. When he was talking to his friend and watching him, the Professor's manner, generally so calm, even so prosaic, vouched for the truth of his story and the well-adjusted balance of his mind. But when he was hidden this was not so. And Father Murchison, standing behind his curtain, with his eyes upon the unconcerned Napoleon, began to whisper to himself the word—madness, with a quickening sensation of pity and of dread.

The parrot sharply contracted one wing, ruffled the feathers around its throat again, then extended its other leg backwards, and proceeded to the cleaning of its other wing. In the still room the dry sound of the feathers being spread was distinctly audible. Father Murchison saw the blue curtains behind which Guildea stood tremble slightly, as if a breath of wind had come through the window they shrouded. The clock in the far room chimed, and a coal dropped into the grate, making a noise like dead leaves stirring abruptly on hard ground. And again a gust of pity and of dread swept over the Father. It seemed to him that he had behaved very foolishly, if not wrongly, in encouraging what must surely be the strange dementia of his friend. He ought to have declined to lend himself to a proceeding that, ludicrous, even childish in itself, might well be dangerous in the encouragement it gave to a diseased expectation. Napoleon's protruding leg, extended wing and twisted neck, his busy and unconscious devotion to the arrangement of his person, his evident sensation of complete loneliness, most comfortable solitude, brought home with vehemence to the Father the undignified buffoonery of his conduct; the more piteous buffoonery of his friend. He seized the curtains with his hand and was about to thrust them aside and issue forth, when an abrupt movement of the parrot stopped him. The bird, as if sharply attracted by something, paused in its pecking, and, with its head still bent backward and twisted sideways on its neck, seemed to listen intently. Its round eye looked glistening and strained, like the eye of a disturbed pigeon. Contracting its wing, it lifted its head and sat for a moment erect on its perch, shifting its feet mechanically up and down, as if a dawning excitement produced in it an uncontrollable desire of movement. Then it thrust its head forward in the direction of the further room and remained perfectly still. Its attitude so strongly suggested the concentration of its attention on something immediately before it, that Father Murchison instinctively stared about the room, half expecting to see Pitting advance softly, having entered through the hidden door. He did not come, and there was no sound in the chamber. Nevertheless, the parrot was obviously getting excited and increasingly attentive. It bent its head lower and lower, stretching out its neck until, almost falling from the perch, it half extended its wings, raising them slightly from its back, as if about to take flight, and fluttering them rapidly up and down. It continued this fluttering movement for what seemed to the Father an immense time. At length, raising its wings as far as possible, it dropped them slowly and deliberately down to its back, caught hold of the edge of its bath with its beak, hoisted itself on to the floor of the cage, waddled to the bars, thrust its head against them, and stood

quite still in the exact attitude it always assumed when its head was being scratched by the Professor. So complete was the suggestion of this delight conveyed by the bird, that Father Murchison felt as if he saw a white finger gently pushed among the soft feathers of its head, and he was seized by a most strong conviction that something, unseen by him but seen and welcomed by Napoleon, stood immediately before the cage.

The parrot presently withdrew its head, as if the coaxing finger had been lifted from it, and its pronounced air of acute physical enjoyment faded into one of marked attention and alert curiosity. Pulling itself up by the bars it climbed again upon its perch, sidled to the left side of the cage, and began apparently to watch something with profound interest. It bowed its head oddly, paused for a moment, then bowed its head again. Father Murchison found himself conceiving —from this elaborate movement of the head—a distinct idea of a personality. The bird's proceedings suggested extreme sentimentality combined with that sort of weak determination which is often the most persistent. Such weak determination is a very common attribute of persons who are partially idiotic. Father Murchison was moved to think of these poor creatures who will often, so strangely and unreasonably, attach themselves with persistence to those who love them least. Like many priests, he had had some experience of them, for the amorous idiot is peculiarly sensitive to the attraction of preachers. This bowing movement of the parrot recalled to his memory a terrible, pale woman who for a time haunted all churches in which he ministered, who was perpetually endeavouring to catch his eye, and who always bent her head with an obsequious and cunningly conscious smile when she did so. The parrot went on bowing, making a short pause between each genuflection, as if it waited for a signal to be given that called into play its imitative faculty.

"Yes, yes, it's imitating an idiot," Father Murchison caught himself saying as he watched.

And he looked again about the room, but saw nothing; except the furniture, the dancing fire, and the serried ranks of the books. Presently the parrot ceased from bowing, and assumed the concentrated and stretched attitude of one listening very keenly. He opened his beak, showing his black tongue, shut it, then opened it again. The Father thought he was going to speak, but he remained silent, although it was obvious that he was trying to bring out something. He bowed again two or three times, paused, and then, again opening his beak, made some remark. The Father could not distinguish any words, but the voice was sickly and disagreeable, a cooing and, at the same time, querulous voice, like a woman's, he thought. And he put his ear nearer to the curtain, listening with almost feverish attention. The bowing was resumed, but this time Napoleon added to it a sidling movement, affectionate and affected, like the movement of a silly and eager thing, nestling up to someone, or giving someone a gentle and furtive nudge. Again the Father thought of that terrible, pale woman who had haunted churches. Several times he had come upon her waiting for him after evening services. Once she had hung her head smiling, and lolled out her tongue and pushed against him sideways in the dark. He remembered how his flesh had

shrunk from the poor thing, the sick loathing of her that he could not banish by remembering that her mind was all astray. The parrot paused, listened, opened his beak, and again said something in the same dove-like, amorous voice, full of sickly suggestion and yet hard, even dangerous, in its intonation. A loathsome voice, the Father thought it. But this time, although he heard the voice more distinctly than before, he could not make up his mind whether it was like a woman's voice or a man's—or perhaps a child's. It seemed to be a human voice, and yet oddly sexless. In order to resolve his doubt he withdrew into the darkness of the curtains, ceased to watch Napoleon and simply listened with keen attention, striving to forget that he was listening to a bird, and to imagine that he was overhearing a human being in conversation. After two or three minutes' silence the voice spoke again, and at some length, apparently repeating several times an affectionate series of ejaculations with a cooing emphasis that was unutterably mawkish and offensive. The sickliness of the voice, its falling intonations and its strange indelicacy, combined with a die-away softness and meretricious refinement, made the Father's flesh creep. Yet he could not distinguish any words, nor could he decide on the voice's sex or age. One thing alone he was certain of as he stood still in the darkness—that such a sound could only proceed from something peculiarly loathsome, could only express a personality unendurably abominable to him, if not to everybody. The voice presently failed, in a sort of husky gasp, and there was a prolonged silence. It was broken by the Professor, who suddenly pulled away the curtains that hid the Father and said to him:

"Come out now, and look."

The Father came into the light, blinking, glanced towards the cage, and saw Napoleon poised motionless on one foot with his head under his wing. He appeared to be asleep. The Professor was pale, and his mobile lips were drawn into an expression of supreme disgust.

"Faugh!" he said.

He walked to the windows of the further room, pulled aside the curtains and pushed the glass up, letting in the air. The bare trees were visible in the grey gloom outside. Guildea leaned out for a minute drawing the night air into his lungs. Presently he turned round to the Father, and exclaimed abruptly:

"Pestilent! Isn't it?"

"Yes—most pestilent."

"Ever hear anything like it?"

"Not exactly."

"Nor I. It gives me nausea, Murchison, absolute physical nausea."

He closed the window and walked uneasily about the room.

"What d'you make of it?" he asked, over his shoulder.

"How d'you mean exactly?"

"Is it man's, woman's, or child's voice?"

"I can't tell, I can't make up my mind."

"Nor I."

"Have you heard it often?"

"Yes, since I returned from Westgate. There are never any words that I can distinguish. What a voice!"

He spat into the fire.

"Forgive me," he said, throwing himself down in a chair. "It turns my stomach —literally."

"And mine," said the Father truly.

"The worst of it is," continued Guildea, with a high, nervous accent, "that there's no brain with it, none at all—only the cunning of idiocy."

The Father started at this exact expression of his own conviction by another.

"Why d'you start like that?" said Guildea, with a quick suspicion which showed the unnatural condition of his nerves.

"Well, the very same idea had occurred to me."

"What?"

"That I was listening to the voice of something idiotic."

"Ah! That's the devil of it, you know, to a man like me. I could fight against brain—but this!"

He sprang up again, poked the fire violently, then stood on the hearth-rug with his back to it, and his hands thrust into the high pockets of his trousers.

"That's the voice of the thing that's got into my house," he said. "Pleasant, isn't it?"

And now there was really horror in his eyes, and his voice.

"I must get it out," he exclaimed. "I must get it out. But how?"

He tugged at his short black beard with a quivering hand.

"How?" he continued. "For what is it? Where is it?"

"You feel it's here—now?"

"Undoubtedly. But I couldn't tell you in what part of the room."

He stared about, glancing rapidly at everything.

"Then you consider yourself haunted?" said Father Murchison.

He, too, was much moved and disturbed, although he was not conscious of the presence of anything near them in the room.

"I have never believed in any nonsense of that kind, as you know," Guildea answered. "I simply state a fact, which I cannot understand, and which is beginning to be very painful to me. There is something here. But whereas most so-called hauntings have been described to me as inimical, what I am conscious of is that I am admired, loved, desired. This is distinctly horrible to me, Murchison, distinctly horrible."

Father Murchison suddenly remembered the first evening he had spent with Guildea, and the latter's expression almost of disgust, at the idea of receiving warm affection from anyone. In the light of that long ago conversation, the present event seemed supremely strange, and almost like a punishment for an offence committed by the Professor against humanity. But, looking up at his friend's twitching face, the Father resolved not to be caught in the net of his hideous belief.

"There can be nothing here," he said. "It's impossible."

"What does that bird imitate, then?"

"The voice of someone who has been here."

"Within the last week then. For it never spoke like that before, and mind, I noticed that it was watching and striving to imitate something before I went away, since the night that I went into the Park, only since then."

"Somebody with a voice like that must have been here while you were away," Father Murchison repeated, with a gentle obstinacy.

"I'll soon find out."

Guildea pressed the bell. Pitting stole in almost immediately.

"Pitting," said the Professor, speaking in a high, sharp voice, "did anyone come into this room during my absence at the sea?"

"Certainly not, sir, except the maids—and me, sir."

"Not a soul? You are certain?"

"Perfectly certain, sir."

The cold voice of the butler sounded surprised, almost resentful. The Professor flung out his hand towards the cage.

"Has the bird been here the whole time?"

"Yes, sir."

"He was not moved, taken elsewhere, even for a moment?"

Pitting's pale face began to look almost expressive, and his lips were pursed.

"Certainly not, sir."

"Thank you. That will do."

The butler retired, moving with a sort of ostentatious rectitude. When he had reached the door, and was just going out, his master called:

"Wait a minute, Pitting."

The butler paused. Guildea bit his lips, tugged at his beard uneasily two or three times, and then said:

"Have you noticed—er—the parrot talking lately in a—a very peculiar, very disagreeable voice?"

"Yes, sir—a soft voice like, sir."

"Ha! Since when?"

"Since you went away, sir. He's always at it."

"Exactly. Well, and what did you think of it?"

"Beg pardon, sir?"

"What do you think about his talking in this voice?"

"Oh, that it's only his play, sir."

"I see. That's all, Pitting."

The butler disappeared and closed the door noiselessly behind him.

Guildea turned his eyes on his friend.

"There, you see!" he ejaculated.

"It's certainly very odd," said the Father. "Very odd indeed. You are certain you have no maid who talks at all like that?"

"My dear Murchison! Would you keep a servant with such a voice about you for two days?"

"No."

"My housemaid has been with me for five years, my cook for seven. You've

heard Pitting speak. The three of them make up my entire household. A parrot never speaks in a voice it has not heard. Where has it heard that voice?"

"But we hear nothing?"

"No. Nor do we see anything. But it does. It feels something too. Didn't you observe it presenting its head to be scratched?"

"Certainly it seemed to be doing so."

"It was doing so."

Father Murchison said nothing. He was full of increasing discomfort that almost amounted to apprehension.

"Are you convinced?" said Guildea, rather irritably.

"No. The whole matter is very strange. But till I hear, see or feel—as you do—the presence of something, I cannot believe."

"You mean that you will not?"

"Perhaps. Well, it is time I went."

Guildea did not try to detain him, but said, as he let him out:

"Do me a favour, come again to-morrow night."

The Father had an engagement. He hesitated, looked into the Professor's face and said:

"I will. At nine I'll be with you. Good-night."

When he was on the pavement he felt relieved. He turned round, saw Guildea stepping into his passage, and shivered.

5

Father Murchison walked all the way home to Bird Street that night. He required exercise after the strange and disagreeable evening he had spent, an evening upon which he looked back already as a man looks back upon a nightmare. In his ears, as he walked, sounded the gentle and intolerable voice. Even the memory of it caused him physical discomfort. He tried to put it from him, and to consider the whole matter calmly. The Professor had offered his proof that there was some strange presence in his house. Could any reasonable man accept such proof? Father Murchison told himself that no reasonable man could accept it. The parrot's proceedings were, no doubt, extraordinary. The bird had succeeded in producing an extraordinary illusion of an invisible presence in the room. But that there really was such a presence the Father insisted on denying to himself. The devoutly religious, those who believe implicitly in the miracles recorded in the Bible, and who regulate their lives by the messages they suppose themselves to receive directly from the Great Ruler of a hidden World, are seldom inclined to accept any notion of supernatural intrusion into the affairs of daily life. They put it from them with anxious determination. They regard it fixedly as hocus-pocus, childish if not wicked.

Father Murchison inclined to the normal view of the devoted churchman. He was determined to incline to it. He could not—so he now told himself—accept the idea that his friend was being supernaturally punished for his lack of humanity, his deficiency in affection, by being obliged to endure the love of some

horrible thing, which could not be seen, heard, or handled. Nevertheless, retribution did certainly seem to wait upon Guildea's condition. That which he had unnaturally dreaded and shrunk from in his thought he seemed to be now forced unnaturally to suffer. The Father prayed for his friend that night before the little, humble altar in the barely-furnished, cell-like chamber where he slept.

On the following evening, when he called in Hyde Park Place, the door was opened by the housemaid, and Father Murchison mounted the stairs, wondering what had become of Pitting. He was met at the library door by Guildea and was painfully struck by the alteration in his appearance. His face was ashen in hue, and there were lines beneath his eyes. The eyes themselves looked excited and horribly forlorn. His hair and dress were disordered and his lips twitched continually, as if he were shaken by some acute nervous apprehension.

"What has become of Pitting?" asked the Father, grasping Guildea's hot and feverish hand.

"He has left my service."

"Left your service!" exclaimed the Father in utter amazement.

"Yes, this afternoon."

"May one ask why?"

"I'm going to tell you. It's all part and parcel of this—this most odious business. You remember once discussing the relations men ought to have with their servants?"

"Ah!" cried the Father, with a flash of inspiration. "The crisis has occurred?"

"Exactly," said the Professor, with a bitter smile. "The crisis has occurred. I called upon Pitting to be a man and a brother. He responded by declining the invitation. I upbraided him. He gave me warning. I paid him his wages and told him he could go at once. And he has gone. What are you looking at me like that for?"

"I didn't know," said Father Murchison, hastily dropping his eyes, and looking away. "Why," he added, "Napoleon is gone too."

"I sold him to-day to one of those shops in Shaftesbury Avenue."

"Why?"

"He sickened me with his abominable imitation of—his intercourse with—well, you know what he was at last night. Besides, I have no further need of his proof to tell me I am not dreaming. And, being convinced as I now am, that all I have thought to have happened has actually happened, I care very little about convincing others. Forgive me for saying so, Murchison, but I am now certain that my anxiety to make you believe in the presence of something here really arose from some faint doubt on that subject—within myself. All doubt has now vanished."

"Tell me why."

"I will."

Both men were standing by the fire. They continued to stand while Guildea went on:

"Last night I felt it."

"What?" cried the Father.

"I say that last night, as I was going upstairs to bed, I felt something accompanying me and nestling up against me."

"How horrible!" exclaimed the Father, involuntarily.

Guildea smiled drearily.

"I will not deny the horror of it. I cannot, since I was compelled to call on Pitting for assistance."

"But—tell me—what was it, at least what did it seem to be?"

"It seemed to be a human being. It seemed, I say; and what I mean exactly is that the effect upon me was rather that of human contact than of anything else. But I could see nothing, hear nothing. Only, three times, I felt this gentle, but determined, push against me, as if to coax me and to attract my attention. The first time it happened I was on the landing outside this room, with my foot on the first stair. I will confess to you, Murchison, that I bounded upstairs like one pursued. That is the shameful truth. Just as I was about to enter my bedroom, however, I felt the thing entering with me, and, as I have said, squeezing, with loathsome, sickening tenderness, against my side. Then—"

He paused, turned towards the fire and leaned his head on his arm. The Father was greatly moved by the strange helplessness and despair of the attitude. He laid his hand affectionately on Guildea's shoulder.

"Then?"

Guildea lifted his head. He looked painfully abashed.

"Then, Murchison, I am ashamed to say, I broke down, suddenly, unaccountably, in a way I should have thought wholly impossible to me. I struck out with my hands to thrust the thing away. It pressed more closely to me. The pressure, the contact became unbearable to me. I shouted out for Pitting. I—I believe I must have cried—'Help.'"

"He came, of course?"

"Yes, with his usual soft, unemotional quiet. His calm—its opposition to my excitement of disgust and horror—must, I suppose, have irritated me. I was not myself, no, no!"

He stopped abruptly. Then—

"But I need hardly tell you that," he added, with most piteous irony.

"And what did you say to Pitting?"

"I said that he should have been quicker. He begged my pardon. His cold voice really maddened me, and I burst out into some foolish, contemptible diatribe, called him a machine, taunted him, then—as I felt that loathsome thing nestling once more to me—begged him to assist me, to stay with me, not to leave me alone—I meant in the company of my tormentor. Whether he was frightened, or whether he was angry at my unjust and violent manner and speech a moment before, I don't know. In any case he answered that he was engaged as a butler, and not to sit up all night with people. I suspect he thought I had taken too much to drink. No doubt that was it. I believe I swore at him as a coward—I! This morning he said he wished to leave my service. I gave him a month's wages, a good character as a butler, and sent him off at once."

"But the night? How did you pass it?"

"I sat up all night."

"Where? In your bedroom?"

"Yes—with the door open—to let it go."

"You felt that it stayed?"

"It never left me for a moment, but it did not touch me again. When it was light I took a bath, lay down for a little while, but did not close my eyes. After breakfast I had the explanation with Pitting and paid him. Then I came up here. My nerves were in a very shattered condition. Well, I sat down, tried to write, to think. But the silence was broken in the most abominable manner."

"How?"

"By the murmur of that appalling voice, that voice of a love-sick idiot, sickly but determined. Ugh!"

He shuddered in every limb. Then he pulled himself together, assumed, with a self-conscious effort, his most determined, most aggressive, manner, and added:

"I couldn't stand that. I had come to the end of my tether; so I sprang up, ordered a cab to be called, seized the cage and drove with it to a bird shop in Shaftesbury Avenue. There I sold the parrot for a trifle. I think, Murchison, that I must have been nearly mad then, for, as I came out of the wretched shop, and stood for an instant on the pavement among the cages of rabbits, guinea-pigs, and puppy dogs, I laughed aloud. I felt as if a load was lifted from my shoulders, as if in selling that voice I had sold the cursed thing that torments me. But when I got back to the house it was here. It's here now. I suppose it will always be here."

He shuffled his feet on the rug in front of the fire.

"What on earth am I to do?" he said. "I'm ashamed of myself, Murchison, but—but I suppose there are things in the world that certain men simply can't endure. Well, I can't endure this, and there's an end of the matter."

He ceased. The Father was silent. In presence of this extraordinary distress he did not know what to say. He recognised the uselessness of attempting to comfort Guildea, and he sat with his eyes turned, almost moodily, to the ground. And while he sat there he tried to give himself to the influences within the room, to feel all that was within it. He even, half-unconsciously, tried to force his imagination to play tricks with him. But he remained totally unaware of any third person with them. At length he said:

"Guildea, I cannot pretend to doubt the reality of your misery here. You must go away, and at once. When is your Paris lecture?"

"Next week. In nine days from now."

"Go to Paris to-morrow then; you say you have never had any consciousness that this—this thing pursued you beyond your own front door?"

"Never—hitherto."

"Go to-morrow morning. Stay away till after your lecture. And then let us see if the affair is at an end. Hope, my dear friend, hope."

He had stood up. Now he clasped the Professor's hand.

"See all your friends in Paris. Seek distractions. I would ask you also to seek—other help."

He said the last words with a gentle, earnest gravity and simplicity that touched Guildea, who returned his handclasp almost warmly.

"I'll go," he said. "I'll catch the ten o'clock train, and to-night I'll sleep at an hotel, at the Grosvenor—that's close to the station. It will be more convenient for the train."

As Father Murchison went home that night he kept thinking of that sentence: "It will be more convenient for the train." The weakness in Guildea that had prompted its utterance appalled him.

6

No letter came to Father Murchison from the Professor during the next few days, and this silence reassured him, for it seemed to betoken that all was well. The day of the lecture dawned, and passed. On the following morning, the Father eagerly opened the *Times*, and scanned its pages to see if there were any report of the great meeting of scientific men which Guildea had addressed. He glanced up and down the columns with anxious eyes, then suddenly his hands stiffened as they held the sheets. He had come upon the following paragraph:

"We regret to announce that Professor Frederic Guildea was suddenly seized with severe illness yesterday evening while addressing a scientific meeting in Paris. It was observed that he looked very pale and nervous when he rose to his feet. Nevertheless, he spoke in French fluently for about a quarter of an hour. Then he appeared to become uneasy. He faltered and glanced about like a man apprehensive, or in severe distress. He even stopped once or twice, and seemed unable to go on, to remember what he wished to say. But, pulling himself together with an obvious effort, he continued to address the audience. Suddenly, however, he paused again, edged furtively along the platform, as if pursued by something which he feared, struck out with his hands, uttered a loud, harsh cry and fainted. The sensation in the hall was indescribable. People rose from their seats. Women screamed, and, for a moment, there was a veritable panic. It is feared that the Professor's mind must have temporarily given way owing to overwork. We understand that he will return to England as soon as possible, and we sincerely hope that necessary rest and quiet will soon have the desired effect, and that he will be completely restored to health and enabled to prosecute further the investigations which have already so benefited the world."

The Father dropped the paper, hurried out into Bird Street, sent a wire of enquiry to Paris, and received the same day the following reply: "Returning to-morrow. Please call evening. Guildea." On that evening the Father called in Hyde Park Place, was at once admitted, and found Guildea sitting by the fire in the library, ghastly pale, with a heavy rug over his knees. He looked like a man emaciated by a long and severe illness, and in his wide open eyes there was an expression of fixed horror. The Father started at the sight of him, and could

scarcely refrain from crying out. He was beginning to express his sympathy when Guildea stopped him with a trembling gesture.

"I know all that," Guildea said, "I know. This Paris affair——" He faltered and stopped.

"You ought never to have gone," said the Father. "I was wrong. I ought not to have advised your going. You were not fit."

"I was perfectly fit," he answered, with the irritability of sickness. "But I was—I was accompanied by that abominable thing."

He glanced hastily round him, shifted his chair and pulled the rug higher over his knees. The Father wondered why he was thus wrapped up. For the fire was bright and red and the night was not very cold.

"I was accompanied to Paris," he continued, pressing his upper teeth upon his lower lip.

He paused again, obviously striving to control himself. But the effort was vain. There was no resistance in the man. He writhed in his chair and suddenly burst forth in a tone of hopeless lamentation.

"Murchison, this being, thing—whatever it is—no longer leaves me even for a moment. It will not stay here unless I am here, for it loves me, persistently, idiotically. It accompanied me to Paris, stayed with me there, pursued me to the lecture hall, pressed against me, caressed me while I was speaking. It has returned with me here. It is here now,"—he uttered a sharp cry—"now, as I sit here with you. It is nestling up to me, fawning upon me, touching my hands. Man, man, can't you feel that it is here?"

"No," the Father answered truly.

"I try to protect myself from its loathsome contact," Guildea continued, with fierce excitement, clutching the thick rug with both hands. "But nothing is of any avail against it. Nothing. What is it? What can it be? Why should it have come to me that night?"

"Perhaps as a punishment," said the Father, with a quick softness.

"For what?"

"You hated affection. You put human feeling aside with contempt. You had, you desired to have, no love for anyone. Nor did you desire to receive any love from anything. Perhaps this is a punishment."

Guildea stared into his face.

"D'you believe that?" he cried.

"I don't know," said the Father. "But it may be so. Try to endure it, even to welcome it. Possibly then the persecution will cease."

"I know it means me no harm," Guildea exclaimed, "it seeks me out of affection. It was led to me by some amazing attraction which I exercise over it ignorantly. I know that. But to a man of my nature that is the ghastly part of the matter. If it would hate me, I could bear it. If it would attack me, if it would try to do me some dreadful harm, I should become a man again. I should be braced to fight against it. But this gentleness, this abominable solicitude, this brainless worship of an idiot, persistent, sickly, horribly physical, I cannot endure. What does it want of me? What would it demand of me? It nestles to me. It

leans against me. I feel its touch, like the touch of a feather, trembling about my heart, as if it sought to number my pulsations, to find out the inmost secrets of my impulses and desires. No privacy is left to me." He sprang up excitedly. "I cannot withdraw," he cried, "I cannot be alone, untouched, unworshipped, unwatched for even one-half second. Murchison, I am dying of this, I am dying."

He sank down again in his chair, staring apprehensively on all sides, with the passion of some blind man, deluded in the belief that by his furious and continued effort he will attain sight. The Father knew well that he sought to pierce the veil of the invisible, and have knowledge of the thing that loved him.

"Guildea," the Father said, with insistent earnestness, "try to endure this—do more—try to give this thing what it seeks."

"But it seeks my love."

"Learn to give it your love and it may go, having received what it came for."

"T'sh! You talk like a priest. Suffer your persecutors. Do good to them that despitefully use you. You talk as a priest."

"As a friend I spoke naturally, indeed, right out of my heart. The idea suddenly came to me that all this—truth or seeming, it doesn't matter which—may be some strange form of lesson. I have had lessons—painful ones. I shall have many more. If you could welcome—"

"I can't! I can't!" Guildea cried fiercely. "Hatred! I can give it that—always that, nothing but that—hatred, hatred."

He raised his voice, glared into the emptiness of the room, and repeated, "Hatred!"

As he spoke the waxen pallor of his cheeks increased, until he looked like a corpse with living eyes. The Father feared that he was going to collapse and faint, but suddenly he raised himself upon his chair and said, in a high and keen voice, full of suppressed excitement:

"Murchison, Murchison!"

"Yes. What is it?"

An amazing ecstasy shone in Guildea's eyes.

"It wants to leave me," he cried. "It wants to go! Don't lose a moment! Let it out! The window—the window!"

The Father, wondering, went to the near window, drew aside the curtains and pushed it open. The branches of the trees in the garden creaked drily in the light wind. Guildea leaned forward on the arms of his chair. There was silence for a moment. Then Guildea, speaking in a rapid whisper, said:

"No, no. Open this door—open the hall door. I feel—I feel that it will return the way it came. Make haste—ah, go!"

The Father obeyed—to soothe him, hurried to the door and opened it wide. Then he glanced back to Guildea. He was standing up, bent forward. His eyes were glaring with eager expectation, and, as the Father turned, he made a furious gesture towards the passage with his thin hands.

The Father hastened out and down the stairs. As he descended in the twilight he fancied he heard a slight cry from the room behind him, but he did not pause. He flung the hall door open, standing back against the wall. After wait-

ing a moment—to satisfy Guildea, he was about to close the door again, and had his hand on it, when he was attracted irresistibly to look forth towards the park. The night was lit by a young moon, and, gazing through the railings, his eyes fell upon a bench beyond them.

Upon the bench something was sitting, huddled together very strangely.

The Father remembered instantly Guildea's description of that former night, that night of Advent, and a sensation of horror-stricken curiosity stole through him.

Was there then really something that had indeed come to the Professor? And had it finished its work, fulfilled its desire and gone back to its former existence?

The Father hesitated a moment in the doorway. Then he stepped out resolutely and crossed the road, keeping his eyes fixed upon this black or dark object that leaned so strangely upon the bench. He could not tell yet what it was like, but he fancied it was unlike anything with which his eyes were acquainted. He reached the opposite path, and was about to pass through the gate in the railings, when his arm was brusquely grasped. He started, turned round, and saw a policeman eyeing him suspiciously.

"What are you up to?" said the policeman.

The Father was suddenly aware that he had no hat upon his head, and that his appearance, as he stole forward in his cassock, with his eyes intently fixed upon the bench in the Park, was probably unusual enough to excite suspicion.

"It's all right, policeman," he answered quickly, thrusting some money into the constable's hand.

Then, breaking from him, the Father hurried towards the bench, bitterly vexed at the interruption. When he reached it, nothing was there. Guildea's experience had been almost exactly repeated and, filled with unreasonable disappointment, the Father returned to the house, entered it, shut the door and hastened up the narrow stairway into the library.

On the hearthrug, close to the fire, he found Guildea lying with his head lolled against the armchair from which he had recently risen. There was a shocking expression of terror on his convulsed face. On examining him the Father found that he was dead.

The doctor, who was called in, said that the cause of death was failure of the heart.

When Father Murchison was told this, he murmured:

"Failure of the heart! It was that then!"

He turned to the doctor and said:

"Could it have been prevented?"

The doctor drew on his gloves and answered:

"Possibly, if it had been taken in time. Weakness of the heart requires a great deal of care. The Professor was too much absorbed in his work. He should have lived very differently."

The Father nodded.

"Yes, yes," he said, sadly.

"Saki" (H. H. Munro)

THE OPEN WINDOW

from BEASTS AND SUPER-BEASTS

The Viking Press

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My aunt will be down presently, Mr. Nuttel," said a very self-possessed young lady of fifteen; "in the meantime you must try and put up with me."

Framton Nuttel endeavoured to say the correct something which should duly flatter the niece of the moment without unduly discounting the aunt that was to come. Privately he doubted more than ever whether these formal visits on a succession of total strangers would do much towards helping the nerve cure which he was supposed to be undergoing.

"I know how it will be," his sister had said when he was preparing to migrate to this rural retreat; "you will bury yourself down there and not speak to a living soul, and your nerves will be worse than ever from moping. I shall just give you letters of introduction to all the people I know there. Some of them, as far as I can remember, were quite nice."

Framton wondered whether Mrs. Sappleton, the lady to whom he was presenting one of the letters of introduction, came into the nice division.

"Do you know many of the people round here?" asked the niece, when she judged that they had had sufficient silent communion.

"Hardly a soul," said Framton. "My sister was staying here, at the rectory, you know, some four years ago, and she gave me letters of introduction to some of the people here."

He made the last statement in a tone of distinct regret.

"Then you know practically nothing about my aunt?" pursued the self-possessed young lady.

"Only her name and address," admitted the caller. He was wondering whether Mrs. Sappleton was in the married or widowed state. An indefinable something about the room seemed to suggest masculine habitation.

"Her great tragedy happened just three years ago," said the child; "that would be since your sister's time."

"Her tragedy?" asked Framton; somehow in this restful country spot tragedies seemed out of place.

"You may wonder why we keep that window wide open on an October afternoon," said the niece, indicating a large French window that opened on to a lawn.

"It is quite warm for the time of the year," said Framton; "but has that window got anything to with the tragedy?"

"Out through that window, three years ago to a day, her husband and her two young brothers went off for their day's shooting. They never came back. In crossing the moor to their favourite snipe-shooting ground they were all three engulfed in a treacherous piece of bog. It had been that dreadful wet summer, you know, and places that were safe in other years gave way suddenly without warning. Their bodies were never recovered. That was the dreadful part of it." Here the child's voice lost its self-possessed note and became falteringly human. "Poor aunt always thinks that they will come back some day, they and the little brown spaniel that was lost with them, and walk in at that window just as they used to do. That is why the window is kept open every evening till it is quite dusk. Poor dear aunt, she has often told me how they went out, her husband with his white waterproof coat over his arm, and Ronnie, her youngest brother, singing 'Bertie, why do you bound?' as he always did to tease her, because she said it got on her nerves. Do you know, sometimes on still, quiet evenings like this, I almost get a creepy feeling that they will all walk in through that window—"

She broke off with a little shudder. It was a relief to Framton when the aunt bustled into the room with a whirl of apologies for being late in making her appearance.

"I hope Vera has been amusing you?" she said.

"She has been very interesting," said Framton.

"I hope you don't mind the open window," said Mrs. Sappleton briskly; "my husband and brothers will be home directly from shooting, and they always come in this way. They've been out for snipe in the marshes to-day, so they'll make a fine mess over my poor carpets. So like you men-folks, isn't it?"

She rattled on cheerfully about the shooting and the scarcity of birds, and the prospects for duck in the winter. To Framton it was all purely horrible. He made desperate but only partially successful effort to turn the talk on to a less ghastly topic; he was conscious that his hostess was giving him only a fragment of her attention, and her eyes were constantly straying past him to the open window and the lawn beyond. It was certainly an unfortunate coincidence that he should have paid his visit on this tragic anniversary.

"The doctors agree in ordering me complete rest, an absence of mental excitement, and avoidance of anything in the nature of violent physical exercise," announced Framton, who laboured under the tolerably wide-spread delusion that total strangers and chance acquaintances are hungry for the least detail of one's ailments and infirmities, their cause and cure. "On the matter of diet they are not so much in agreement," he continued.

"No?" said Mrs. Sappleton, in a voice which only replaced a yawn at the last moment. Then she suddenly brightened into alert attention—but not to what Framton was saying.

"Here they are at last!" she cried. "Just in time for tea, and don't they look as if they were muddy up to the eyes!"

Framton shivered slightly and turned toward the niece with a look intended to

convey sympathetic comprehension. The child was staring out through the open window with dazed horror in her eyes. In a chill shock of nameless fear Framton swung round in his seat and looked in the same direction.

In the deepening twilight three figures were walking across the lawn towards the window; they all carried guns under their arms, and one of them was additionally burdened with a white coat hung over his shoulders. A tired brown spaniel kept close at their heels. Noiselessly they neared the house, and then a hoarse young voice chanted out of the dusk: "I said, Bertie, why do you bound?"

Framton grabbed wildly at his stick and hat; the hall-door, the gravel-drive, and the front gate were dimly-noted stages in his headlong retreat. A cyclist coming along the road had to run into the hedge to avoid imminent collision.

"Here we are, my dear," said the bearer of the white mackintosh, coming in through the window; "fairly muddy, but most of it's dry. Who was that who bolted out as we came up?"

"A most extraordinary man, a Mr. Nuttel," said Mrs. Sappleton; "could only talk about his illness, and dashed off without a word of good-bye or apology when you arrived. One would think he had seen a ghost."

"I expect it was the spaniel," said the niece calmly; "he told me he had a horror of dogs. He was once hunted into a cemetery somewhere on the banks of the Ganges by a pack of pariah dogs, and had to spend the night in a newly dug grave with the creatures snarling and grinning and foaming just above him. Enough to make anyone lose their nerve."

Romance at short notice was her specialty.

Arthur Machen

THE NOVEL OF THE BLACK SEAL

from The Three Impostors

Alfred A. Knopf, 1924

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Related by the young lady in Leicester Square

PROLOGUE

"I see you are a determined rationalist," said the lady. "Did you not hear me say that I have had experiences even more terrible? I too was once a sceptic, but after what I have known I can no longer affect to doubt."

"Madam," replied Mr. Phillipps, "no one shall make me deny my faith. I will never believe, nor will I pretend to believe, that two and two make five, nor will I on any pretences admit the existence of two-sided triangles."

"You are a little hasty," rejoined the lady. "But may I ask you if you ever heard the name of Professor Gregg, the authority on ethnology and kindred subjects?"

"I have done much more than merely hear of Professor Gregg," said Phillipps. "I always regarded him as one of our most acute and clear-headed observers; and his last publication, the 'Textbook of Ethnology,' struck me as being quite admirable in its kind. Indeed, the book had but come into my hands when I heard of the terrible accident which cut short Gregg's career. He had, I think, taken a country house in the West of England for the summer, and is supposed to have fallen into a river. So far as I remember, his body was never recovered."

"Sir, I am sure that you are discreet. Your conversation seems to declare as much, and the very title of that little work of yours which you mentioned assures me that you are no empty trifler. In a word, I feel that I may depend on you. You appear to be under the impression that Professor Gregg is dead; I have no reason to believe that that is the case."

"What?" cried Phillipps, astonished and perturbed. "You do not hint that there was anything disgraceful? I cannot believe it. Gregg was a man of clearest character; his private life was one of great benevolence; and though I myself am free from delusions, I believe him to have been a sincere and devout Christian. Surely you cannot mean to insinuate that some disreputable history forced him to flee the country?"

"Again you are in a hurry," replied the lady. "I said nothing of all this. Briefly, then, I must tell you that Professor Gregg left this house one morning in full health both in mind and body. He never returned, but his watch and chain, a purse containing three sovereigns in gold, and some loose silver, with a ring that he wore habitually, were found three days later on a wild and savage hillside, many miles from the river. These articles were placed beside a limestone rock of fantastic form; they had been wrapped into a parcel with a kind of rough parchment which was secured with gut. The parcel was opened, and the inner side of the parchment bore an inscription done with some red substance; the characters were undecipherable, but seemed to be a corrupt cuneiform."

"You interest me intensely," said Phillipps. "Would you mind continuing your story? The circumstance you have mentioned seems to me of the most inexplicable character, and I thirst for an elucidation."

The young lady seemed to meditate for a moment, and she then proceeded to relate the

NOVEL OF THE BLACK SEAL

I must now give you some fuller particulars of my history. I am the daughter of a civil engineer, Steven Lally by name, who was so unfortunate as to die suddenly at the outset of his career, and before he had accumulated sufficient means to support his wife and her two children.

My mother contrived to keep the small household going on resources which must have been incredibly small; we lived in a remote country village, because most of the necessaries of life were cheaper than in a town, but even so we were brought up with the severest economy. My father was a clever and well-read man, and left behind him a small but select collection of books, containing the best Greek, Latin, and English classics, and these books were the only amusement we possessed. My brother, I remember, learnt Latin out of Descartes' *Meditatione*, and I, in place of the little tales which children are usually told to read, had nothing more charming than a translation of the *Gesta Romanorum*. We grew up thus, quiet and studious children, and in course of time my brother provided for himself in the manner I have mentioned. I continued to live at home; my poor mother had become an invalid, and demanded my continual care, and about two years ago she died after many months of painful illness. My situation was a terrible one; the shabby furniture barely sufficed to pay the debts I had been forced to contract, and the books I dispatched to my brother, knowing how he would value them. I was absolutely alone; I was aware how poorly my brother was paid; and though I came up to London in the hope of finding employment, with the understanding that he would defray my expenses, I swore it should only be for a month, and that if I could not in that time find some work, I would starve rather than deprive him of the few miserable pounds he had laid by for his day of trouble. I took a little room in a distant suburb, the cheapest that I could find; I lived on bread and tea, and I spent my time in vain answering of advertisements, and vainer walks to addresses I had noted. Day followed on day, and week on week, and still I was unsuccessful, till at last the term I had appointed drew to a close, and I saw before me the grim prospect of slowly dying of starvation. My landlady was good-natured in her way; she knew the slenderness of my means, and I am sure that she would not have turned me out of doors; it remained for me then to go away, and to try to die in some quiet place. It was winter then, and a thick white fog gathered in the early part of the afternoon, becoming more dense as the day wore on; it was a Sunday, I remember, and the people of the house were at chapel. At about three o'clock I crept out and walked away as quickly as I could, for I was weak from abstinence. The white mist wrapped all the streets in silence, a hard frost had gathered thick upon the bare branches of the trees, and frost crystals glittered on the wooden fences, and on the cold, cruel ground beneath my feet. I walked on, turning to right and left in utter haphazard, without caring to look up at the names of the streets, and all that I remember of my walk on that Sunday afternoon seems but the broken fragments of an evil dream. In a confused vision I stumbled on, through roads half town and half country, grey fields melting into the cloudy world of mist on one side of me, and on the other comfortable villas with a glow of firelight flickering on the walls, but all unreal; red brick walls and lighted windows, vague trees, and glimmering country, gas-lamps beginning to star the white shadows, the vanishing perspectives of the railway line beneath high embankments, the green and red of the signal lamps—all these were but momentary pictures flashed on my tired brain and senses numbed by hunger. Now and

then I would hear a quick step ringing on the iron road, and men would pass me well wrapped up, walking fast for the sake of warmth, and no doubt eagerly foretasting the pleasures of a glowing hearth, with curtains tightly drawn about the frosted panes, and the welcomes of their friends; but as the early evening darkened and night approached, foot-passengers got fewer and fewer, and I passed through street after street alone. In the white silence I stumbled on, as desolate as if I trod the streets of a buried city; and as I grew more weak and exhausted, something of the horror of death was folding thickly round my heart. Suddenly, as I turned a corner, some one accosted me courteously beneath the lamp-post, and I heard a voice asking if I could kindly point the way to Avon Road. At the sudden shock of human accents I was prostrated, and my strength gave way; I fell all huddled on the sidewalk, and wept and sobbed and laughed in violent hysteria. I had gone out prepared to die, and as I stepped across the threshold that had sheltered me, I consciously bade adieu to all hopes and all remembrances; the door clanged behind me with the noise of thunder, and I felt that an iron curtain had fallen on the brief passage of my life, that henceforth I was to walk a little way in a world of gloom and shadow; I entered on the stage of the first act of death. Then came my wandering in the mist, the whiteness wrapping all things, the void streets, and muffled silence, till when that voice spoke to me it was as if I had died and life returned to me. In a few minutes I was able to compose my feelings, and as I rose I saw that I was confronted by a middle-aged gentleman of pleasing appearance, neatly and correctly dressed. He looked at me with an expression of great pity, but before I could stammer out my ignorance of the neighbourhood, for indeed I had not the slightest notion of where I had wandered, he spoke.

"My dear madam," he said, "you seem in some terrible distress. You cannot think how you alarmed me. But may I inquire the nature of your trouble? I assure you that you can safely confide in me."

"You are very kind," I replied, "but I fear there is nothing to be done. My condition seems a hopeless one."

"Oh, nonsense, nonsense! You are too young to talk like that. Come, let us walk down here and you must tell me your difficulty. Perhaps I may be able to help you."

There was something very soothing and persuasive in his manner, and as we walked together I gave him an outline of my story, and told of the despair that had oppressed me almost to death.

"You were wrong to give in so completely," he said, when I was silent. "A month is too short a time in which to feel one's way in London. London, let me tell you, Miss Lally, does not lie open and undefended; it is a fortified place, fossed and double moated with curious intricacies. As must always happen in large towns, the conditions of life have become hugely artificial, no mere simple palisade is run up to oppose the man or woman who would take the place by storm, but serried lines of subtle contrivances, mines, and pitfalls which it needs a strange skill to overcome. You, in your simplicity, fancied you had only to shout for these walls to sink into nothingness, but the time is gone for such

startling victories as these. Take courage; you will learn the secret of success before very long."

"Alas! sir," I replied, "I have no doubt your conclusions are correct, but at the present moment I seem to be in a fair way to die of starvation. You spoke of a secret; for Heaven's sake tell it me, if you have any pity for my distress."

He laughed genially. "There lies the strangeness of it all. Those who know the secret cannot tell it if they would; it is positively as ineffable as the central doctrine of Freemasonry. But I may say this, that you yourself have penetrated at least the outer husk of the mystery," and he laughed again.

"Pray do not jest with me," I said. "What have I done, *que sçais-je?* I am so far ignorant that I have not the slightest idea of how my next meal is to be provided."

"Excuse me. You ask what you have done. You have met me. Come, we will fence no longer. I see you have self-education, the only education which is not infinitely pernicious, and I am in want of a governess for my two children. I have been a widower for some years; my name is Gregg. I offer you the post I have named, and shall we say a salary of a hundred a year?"

I could only stutter out my thanks, and slipping a card with his address, and a banknote by way of earnest, into my hand, Mr. Gregg bade me good-bye, asking me to call in a day or two.

Such was my introduction to Professor Gregg, and can you wonder that the remembrance of despair and the cold blast that had blown from the gates of death upon me made me regard him as a second father! Before the close of the week I was installed in my new duties. The professor had leased an old brick manor-house in a western suburb of London, and here, surrounded by pleasant lawns and orchards, and soothed with the murmur of ancient elms that rocked their boughs above the roof, the new chapter of my life began. Knowing as you do the nature of the professor's occupations, you will not be surprised to hear that the house teemed with books, and cabinets full of strange, and even hideous, objects filled every available nook in the vast low rooms. Gregg was a man whose one thought was for knowledge, and I too before long caught something of his enthusiasm, and strove to enter into his passion of research. In a few months I was perhaps more his secretary than the governess of the two children, and many a night I have sat at the desk in the glow of the shaded lamp while he, pacing up and down in the rich gloom of the firelight, dictated to me the substance of his "Textbook of Ethnology." But amidst these more sober and accurate studies I always detected a something hidden, a longing and desire for some object to which he did not allude; and now and then he would break short in what he was saying and lapse into reverie, entranced, as it seemed to me, by some distant prospect of adventurous discovery. The textbook was at last finished, and we began to receive proofs from the printers, which were entrusted to me for a first reading, and then underwent the final revision of the professor. All the while his wariness of the actual business he was engaged on increased, and it was with the joyous laugh of a schoolboy when term is over that he one day handed me a copy of the book. "There," he said, "I have kept my word; I promised to write it, and it is done with. Now I shall be free to live for stranger things;

I confess it, Miss Lally, I covet the renown of Columbus; you will, I hope, see me play the part of an explorer."

"Surely," I said, "there is little left to explore. You have been born a few hundred years too late for that."

"I think you are wrong," he replied; "there are still, depend upon it, quaint, undiscovered countries and continents of strange extent. Ah, Miss Lally! believe me, we stand amidst sacraments and mysteries full of awe, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be. Life, believe me, is no simple thing, no mass of grey matter and congeries of veins and muscles to be laid naked by the surgeon's knife; man is the secret which I am about to explore, and before I can discover him I must cross over weltering seas indeed, and oceans and the mists of many thousand years. You know the myth of the lost Atlantis; what if it be true, and I am destined to be called the discoverer of that wonderful land?"

I could see excitement boiling beneath his words, and in his face was the heat of the hunter; before me stood a man who believed himself summoned to tourney with the unknown. A pang of joy possessed me when I reflected that I was to be in a way associated with him in the adventure, and I, too, burned with the lust of the chase, not pausing to consider that I knew not what we were to unshadow.

The next morning Professor Gregg took me into his inner study, where, ranged against the wall, stood a nest of pigeon-holes, every drawer neatly labelled, and the results of years of toil classified in a few feet of space.

"Here," he said, "is my life; here are all the facts which I have gathered together with so much pains, and yet it is all nothing. No, nothing to what I am about to attempt. Look at this"; and he took me to an old bureau, a piece fantastic and faded, which stood in a corner of the room. He unlocked the front and opened one of the drawers.

"A few scraps of paper," he went on, pointing to the drawer, "and a lump of black stone, rudely annotated with queer marks and scratches—that is all that drawer holds. Here you see is an old envelope with the dark red stamp of twenty years ago, but I have pencilled a few lines at the back; here is a sheet of manuscript, and here some cuttings from obscure local journals. And if you ask me the subject-matter of the collection, it will not seem extraordinary—a servant-girl at a farm-house, who disappeared from her place and has never been heard of, a child supposed to have slipped down some old working on the mountains, some queer scribbling on a limestone rock, a man murdered with a blow from a strange weapon; such is the scent I have to go upon. Yes, as you say, there is a ready explanation for all this; the girl may have run away to London, or Liverpool, or New York; the child may be at the bottom of the disused shaft; and the letters on the rock may be the idle whims of some vagrant. Yes, yes, I admit all that; but I know I hold the true key. Look!" and he held out a slip of yellow paper.

Characters found inscribed on a limestone rock on the Grey Hills, I read, and then there was a word erased, presumably the name of a county, and a date some fifteen years back. Beneath was traced a number of uncouth characters, shaped

somewhat like wedges or daggers, as strange and outlandish as the Hebrew alphabet.

"Now the seal," said Professor Gregg, and he handed me the black stone, a thing about two inches long, and something like an old-fashioned tobacco-stopper, much enlarged.

I held it up to the light, and saw to my surprise the characters on the paper repeated on the seal.

"Yes," said the professor, "they are the same. And the marks on the limestone rock were made fifteen years ago, with some red substance. And the characters on the seal are four thousand years old at least. Perhaps much more."

"Is it a hoax?" I said.

"No, I anticipated that. I was not to be led to give my life to a practical joke. I have tested the matter very carefully. Only one person besides myself knows of the mere existence of that black seal. Besides, there are other reasons which I cannot enter into now."

"But what does it all mean?" I said. "I cannot understand to what conclusion all this leads."

"My dear Miss Lally, that is a question I would rather leave unanswered for some little time. Perhaps I shall never be able to say what secrets are held here in solution; a few vague hints, the outlines of village tragedies, a few marks done with red earth upon a rock, and an ancient seal. A queer set of data to go upon? Half a dozen pieces of evidence, and twenty years before even so much could be got together; and who knows what mirage or *terra incognita* may be beyond all this? I look across deep waters, Miss Lally, and the land beyond may be but a haze after all. But still I believe it is not so, and a few months will show whether I am right or wrong."

He left me, and alone I endeavoured to fathom the mystery, wondering to what goal such eccentric odds and ends of evidence could lead. I myself am not wholly devoid of imagination, and I had reason to respect the professor's solidity of intellect; yet I saw in the contents of the drawer but the materials of fantasy, and vainly tried to conceive what theory could be founded on the fragments that had been placed before me. Indeed, I could discover in what I had heard and seen but the first chapter of an extravagant romance; and yet deep in my heart I burned with curiosity, and day after day I looked eagerly in Professor Gregg's face for some hint of what was to happen.

It was one evening after dinner that the word came.

"I hope you can make your preparations without much trouble," he said suddenly to me. "We shall be leaving here in a week's time."

"Really!" I said in astonishment. "Where are we going?"

"I have taken a country house in the west of England, not far from Caermaen, a quiet little town, once a city, and the headquarters of a Roman legion. It is very dull there, but the country is pretty, and the air is wholesome."

I detected a glint in his eyes, and guessed that this sudden move had some relation to our conversation of a few days before.

"I shall just take a few books with me," said Professor Gregg, "that is all.

Everything else will remain here for our return. I have got a holiday," he went on, smiling at me, "and I shan't be sorry to be quit for a time of my old bones and stones and rubbish. Do you know," he went on, "I have been grinding away at facts for thirty years; it is time for fancies."

The days passed quickly; I could see that the professor was all quivering with suppressed excitement, and I could scarce credit the eager appetence of his glance as we left the old manor-house behind us and began our journey. We set out at midday, and it was in the dusk of the evening that we arrived at a little country station. I was tired and excited, and the drive through the lanes seems all a dream. First the deserted streets of a forgotten village, while I heard Professor Gregg's voice talking of the Augustan Legion and the clash of arms, and all the tremendous pomp that followed the eagles; then the broad river swimming to full tide with the last afterglow glimmering duskily in the yellow water, the wide meadows, the cornfields whitening, and the deep lane winding on the slope between the hills and the water. At last we began to ascend, and the air grew rarer. I looked down and saw the pure white mist tracking the outline of the river like a shroud, and a vague and shadowy country; imaginations and fantasy of swelling hills and hanging woods, and half-shaped outlines of hills beyond, and in the distance of the glare of the furnace fire on the mountain, glowing by turns a pillar of shining flame and fading to a dull point of red. We were slowly mounting a carriage drive, and then there came to me the cool breath and the secret of the great wood that was above us; I seemed to wander in its deepest depths, and there was the sound of trickling water, the scent of the green leaves, and the breath of the summer night. The carriage stopped at last, and I could scarcely distinguish the form of the house, as I waited a moment at the pillared porch. The rest of the evening seemed a dream of strange things bounded by the great silence of the wood and the valley and the river.

The next morning, when I awoke and looked out of the bow window of the big, old-fashioned bedroom, I saw under a grey sky a country that was still all mystery. The long, lovely valley, with the river winding in and out below, crossed in mid-vision by a mediæval bridge of vaulted and buttressed stone, the clear presence of the rising ground beyond, and the woods that I had only seen in shadow the night before, seemed tinged with enchantment, and the soft breath of air that sighed in at the opened pane was like no other wind. I looked across the valley, and beyond, hill followed on hill as wave on wave, and here a faint blue pillar of smoke rose still in the morning air from the chimney of an ancient grey farm-house, there was a rugged height crowned with dark firs, and in the distance I saw the white streak of a road that climbed and vanished into some unimagined country. But the boundary of all was a great wall of mountain, vast in the west, and ending like a fortress with a steep ascent and a domed tumulus clear against the sky.

I saw Professor Gregg walking up and down the terrace path below the windows, and it was evident that he was revelling in the sense of liberty, and the thought that he had for a while bidden good-bye to task-work. When I joined

him there was exultation in his voice as he pointed out the sweep of valley and the river that wound beneath the lovely hills.

"Yes," he said, "it is a strangely beautiful country; and to me, at least, it seems full of mystery. You have not forgotten the drawer I showed you, Miss Lally? No; and you have guessed that I have come here not merely for the sake of the children and the fresh air?"

"I think I have guessed as much as that," I replied; "but you must remember I do not know the mere nature of your investigations; and as for the connection between the search and this wonderful valley, it is past my guessing."

He smiled queerly at me. "You must not think I am making a mystery for the sake of mystery," he said. "I do not speak out because, so far, there is nothing to be spoken, nothing definite, I mean, nothing that can be set down in hard black and white, as dull and sure and irreproachable as any blue-book. And then I have another reason: Many years ago a chance paragraph in a newspaper caught my attention, and focussed in an instant the vagrant thoughts and half-formed fancies of many idle and speculative hours into a certain hypothesis. I saw at once that I was treading on a thin crust; my theory was wild and fantastic in the extreme, and I would not for any consideration have written a hint of it for publication. But I thought that in the company of scientific men like myself, men who knew the course of discovery, and were aware that the gas that blazes and flares in the gin-palace was once a wild hypothesis—I thought that with such men as these I might hazard my dream—let us say Atlantis, or the philosopher's stone, or what you like—without danger of ridicule. I found I was grossly mistaken; my friends looked blankly at me and at one another, and I could see something of pity, and something also of insolent contempt, in the glances they exchanged. One of them called on me next day, and hinted that I must be suffering from overwork and brain exhaustion. 'In plain terms,' I said, 'you think I am going mad. I think not'; and I showed him out with some little appearance of heat. Since that day I vowed that I would never whisper the nature of my theory to any living soul; to no one but yourself have I ever shown the contents of that drawer. After all, I may be following a rainbow; I may have been misled by the play of coincidence; but as I stand here in this mystic hush and silence, amidst the woods and wild hills, I am more than ever sure that I am hot on the scent. Come, it is time we went in."

To me in all this there was something both of wonder and excitement; I knew how in his ordinary work Professor Gregg moved step by step, testing every inch of the way, and never venturing on assertion without proof that was impregnable. Yet I divined, more from his glance and the vehemence of his tone than from the spoken word, that he had in his every thought the vision of the almost incredible continually with him; and I, who was with some share of imagination no little of a sceptic, offended at a hint of the marvellous, could not help asking myself whether he were cherishing a monomania, and barring out from this one subject all the scientific method of his other life.

Yet, with this image of mystery haunting my thoughts, I surrendered wholly to the charm of the country. Above the faded house on the hillside began the

great forest—a long dark line seen from the opposing hills, stretching above the river for many a mile from north to south, and yielding in the north to even wilder country, barren and savage hills, and ragged common-land, a territory all strange and unvisited, and more unknown to Englishmen than the very heart of Africa. The space of a couple of steep fields alone separated the house from the wood, and the children were delighted to follow me up the long alleys of undergrowth, between smooth pleached walls of shining beech, to the highest point in the wood, whence one looked on one side across the river and the rise and fall of the country to the great western mountain wall, and on the other over the surge and dip of the myriad trees of the forest, over level meadows and the shining yellow sea to the faint coast beyond. I used to sit at this point on the warm sunlit turf which marked the track of the Roman Road, while the two children raced about hunting for the whinberries that grew here and there on the banks. Here, beneath the deep blue sky and the great clouds rolling, like olden galleons with sails full-bellied, from the sea to the hills, as I listened to the whispered charm of the great and ancient wood, I lived solely for delight, and only remembered strange things when we would return to the house and find Professor Gregg either shut up in the little room he had made his study, or else pacing the terrace with the look, patient and enthusiastic, of the determined seeker.

One morning, some eight or nine days after our arrival, I looked out of my window and saw the whole landscape transmuted before me. The clouds had dipped low and hidden the mountain in the west; a southern wind was driving the rain in shifting pillars up the valley, and the little brooklet that burst the hill below the house now raged, a red torrent, down the river. We were perforce obliged to keep snug within-doors; and when I had attended to my pupils, I sat down in the morning-room, where the ruins of a library still encumbered an old-fashioned bookcase. I had inspected the shelves once or twice, but their contents had failed to attract me; volumes of eighteenth-century sermons, an old book on farriery, a collection of *Poems* by "persons of quality," Prideaux's *Connection*, and an odd volume of Pope, were the boundaries of the library, and there seemed little doubt that everything of interest or value had been removed. Now, however, in desperation, I began to re-examine the musty sheepskin and calf bindings, and found, much to my delight, a fine old quarto printed by the Stephani, containing the three books of Pomponius Mela, *De Situ Orbis*, and other of the ancient geographers. I knew enough of Latin to steer my way through an ordinary sentence, and I soon became absorbed in the odd mixture of fact and fancy—light shining on a little of the space of the world, and beyond, mist and shadow and awful forms. Glancing over the clear-printed pages, my attention was caught by the heading of a chapter in Solinus, and I read the words:

"MIRA DE INTIMIS GENTIBUS LIBYAE, DE LAPIDE HEXECONTALITHO,"

—"The wonders of the people that inhabit the inner parts of Libya, and of the stone called Sixtystone."

The odd title attracted me, and I read on: "Gens ista avia et secreta habitat,

in montibus horrendis fœda mysteria celebrat. De hominibus nihil aliud illi praeferunt quam figuram, ab humano ritu prorsus exulant, oderunt deum lucis. Stridunt potius quam loquuntur; vox absona nec sine horrore auditur. Lapide quodam gloriantur, quem Hexecontalithon vocant; dicunt enim hunc lapidem sexaginta notas ostendere. Cujus lapidis nomen secretum ineffabile colunt: quod Ixaxar."

"This folk," I translated to myself, "dwells in remote and secret places, and celebrates foul mysteries on savage hills. Nothing have they in common with men save the face, and the customs of humanity are wholly strange to them; and they hate the sun. They hiss rather than speak; their voices are harsh, and not to be heard without fear. They boast of a certain stone, which they call Sixtystone; for they say that it displays sixty characters. And this stone has a secret unspeakable name; which is Ixaxar."

I laughed at the queer inconsequence of all this, and thought it fit for "Sinbad the Sailor," or other of the supplementary Nights. When I saw Professor Gregg in the course of the day, I told him of my find in the bookcase, and the fantastic rubbish I had been reading. To my surprise he looked up at me with an expression of great interest.

"That is really very curious," he said. "I have never thought it worth while to look in the old geographers, and I dare say I have missed a good deal. Ah, that is the passage, is it? It seems a shame to rob you of your entertainment, but I really think I must carry off the book."

The next day the professor called me to come to the study. I found him sitting at a table in the full light of the window, scrutinizing something very attentively with a magnifying glass.

"Ah, Miss Lally," he began, "I want to use your eyes. This glass is pretty good, but not like my old one that I left in town. Would you mind examining the thing yourself, and telling me how many characters are cut on it?"

He handed me the object in his hand. I saw that it was the black seal he had shown me in London, and my heart began to beat with the thought that I was presently to know something. I took the seal, and, holding it up to the light, checked off the grotesque dagger-shaped characters one by one.

"I make sixty-two," I said at last.

"Sixty-two? Nonsense; it's impossible. Ah, I see what you have done, you have counted that and that," and he pointed to two marks which I had certainly taken as letters with the rest.

"Yes, yes," Professor Gregg went on, "but those are obviously scratches, done accidentally; I saw that at once. Yes, then that's quite right. Thank you very much, Miss Lally."

I was going away, rather disappointed at my having been called in merely to count the number of marks on the black seal, when suddenly there flashed into my mind what I had read in the morning.

"But, Professor Gregg," I cried, breathless, "the seal, the seal. Why, it is the stone Hexecontalithos that Solinus writes of; it is Ixaxar."

"Yes," he said, "I suppose it is. Or it may be a mere coincidence. It never does

to be too sure, you know, in these matters. Coincidence killed the professor."

I went away puzzled by what I had heard, and as much as ever at a loss to find the ruling clue in this maze of strange evidence. For three days the bad weather lasted, changing from driving rain to a dense mist, fine and dripping, and we seemed to be shut up in a white cloud that veiled all the world away from us. All the while Professor Gregg was darkling in his room, unwilling, it appeared, to dispense confidences or talk of any kind, and I heard him walking to and fro with a quick, impatient step, as if he were in some way wearied of inaction. The fourth morning was fine, and at breakfast the professor said briskly:

"We want some extra help about the house; a boy of fifteen or sixteen, you know. There are a lot of little odd jobs that take up the maids' time which a boy could do much better."

"The girls have not complained to me in any way," I replied. "Indeed, Anne said there was much less work than in London, owing to there being so little dust."

"Ah, yes, they are very good girls. But I think we shall do much better with a boy. In fact, that is what has been bothering me for the last two days."

"Bothering you?" I said in astonishment, for as a matter of fact the professor never took the slightest interest in the affairs of the house.

"Yes," he said, "the weather, you know. I really couldn't go out in that Scotch mist; I don't know the country very well, and I should have lost my way. But I am going to get the boy this morning."

"But how do you know there is such a boy as you want anywhere about?"

"Oh, I have no doubt as to that. I may have to walk a mile or two at the most, but I am sure to find just the boy I require."

I thought the professor was joking, but, though his tone was airy enough, there was something grim and set about his features that puzzled me. He got his stick, and stood at the door looking meditatively before him, and as I passed through the hall he called to me.

"By the way, Miss Lally, there was one thing I wanted to say to you. I dare say you may have heard that some of these country lads are not over-bright; idiotic would be a harsh word to use, and they are usually called 'naturals,' or something of the kind. I hope you won't mind if the boy I am after should turn out not too keen-witted; he will be perfectly harmless, of course, and blacking boots doesn't need much mental effort."

With that he was gone, striding up the road that led to the wood, and I remained stupefied; and then for the first time my astonishment was mingled with a sudden note of terror, arising I knew not whence, and all unexplained even to myself, and yet I felt about my heart for an instant something of the chill of death, and that shapeless, formless dread of the unknown that is worse than death itself. I tried to find courage in the sweet air that blew up from the sea, and in the sunlight after rain, but the mystic woods seemed to darken around me; and the vision of the river coiling between the reeds, and the silver

grey of the ancient bridge, fashioned in my mind symbols of vague dread, as the mind of a child fashions terror from things harmless and familiar.

Two hours later Professor Gregg returned. I met him as he came down the road, and asked quietly if he had been able to find a boy.

"Oh, yes," he answered; "I found one easily enough. His name is Jervase Cradock, and I expect he will make himself very useful. His father has been dead for many years, and the mother, whom I saw, seemed very glad at the prospect of a few shillings extra coming in on Saturday nights. As I expected, he is not too sharp, has fits at times, the mother said; but as he will not be trusted with the china, that doesn't much matter, does it? And he is not in any way dangerous, you know, merely a little weak."

"When is he coming?"

"To-morrow morning at eight o'clock. Anne will show him what he has to do, and how to do it. At first he will go home every night, but perhaps it may ultimately turn out more convenient for him to sleep here, and only go home for Sundays."

I found nothing to say to all this; Professor Gregg spoke in a quiet tone of matter-of-fact, as indeed was warranted by the circumstance; and yet I could not quell my sensation of astonishment at the whole affair. I knew that in reality no assistance was wanted in the housework, and the professor's prediction that the boy he was to engage might prove a little "simple," followed by so exact a fulfilment, struck me as bizarre in the extreme. The next morning I heard from the housemaid that the boy Cradock had come at eight, and that she had been trying to make him useful. "He doesn't seem quite all there, I don't think, miss," was her comment, and later in the day I saw him helping the old man who worked in the garden. He was a youth of about fourteen, with black hair and black eyes and an olive skin, and I saw at once from the curious vacancy of his expression that he was mentally weak. He touched his forehead awkwardly as I went by, and I heard him answering the gardener in a queer, harsh voice that caught my attention; it gave me the impression of some one speaking deep below under the earth, and there was a strange sibilance, like the hissing of the phonograph as the pointer travels over the cylinder. I heard that he seemed anxious to do what he could, and was quite docile and obedient, and Morgan the gardener, who knew his mother, assured me he was perfectly harmless. "He's always been a bit queer," he said, "and no wonder, after what his mother went through before he was born. I did know his father, Thomas Cradock, well, and a very fine workman he was too, indeed. He got something wrong with his lungs owing to working in the wet woods, and never got over it, and went off quite sudden like. And they do say as how Mrs. Cradock was quite off her head; anyhow, she was found by Mr. Hillyer, Ty Coch, all crouched up on the Grey Hills, over there, crying and weeping like a lost soul. And Jervase, he was born about eight months afterwards, and, as I was saying, he was a bit queer always; and they do say when he could scarcely walk he would frighten the other children into fits with the noises he would make."

A word in the story had stirred up some remembrance within me, and, vaguely curious, I asked the old man where the Grey Hills were.

"Up there," he said, with the same gesture he had used before; "you go past the 'Fox and Hounds,' and through the forest, by the old ruins. It's a good five mile from here, and a strange sort of a place. The poorest soil between this and Monmouth, they do say, though it's good feed for sheep. Yes, it was a sad thing for poor Mrs. Cradock."

The old man turned to his work, and I strolled on down the path between the espaliers, gnarled and gouty with age, thinking of the story I had heard, and groping for the point in it that had some key to my memory. In an instant it came before me; I had seen the phrase "Grey Hills" on the slip of yellowed paper that Professor Gregg had taken from the drawer in his cabinet. Again I was seized with pangs of mingled curiosity and fear, I remembered the strange characters copied from the limestone rock, and then again their identity with the inscription of the age-old seal, and the fantastic fables of the Latin geographer. I saw beyond doubt that, unless coincidence had set all the scene and disposed all these bizarre events with curious art, I was to be a spectator of things far removed from the usual and customary traffic and jostle of life. Professor Gregg I noted day by day, he was hot on his trail, growing lean with eagerness; and in the evenings, when the sun was swimming on the verge of the mountain, he would pace the terrace to and fro with his eyes on the ground, while the mist grew white in the valley, and the stillness of the evening brought far voices near, and the blue smoke rose a straight column from the diamond-shaped chimney of the grey farm-house, just as I had seen it on the first morning. I have told you I was of sceptical habit; but though I understood little or nothing, I began to dread, vainly proposing to myself the iterated dogmas of science that all life is material, and that in the system of things there is no undiscovered land, even beyond the remotest stars, where the supernatural can find a footing. Yet there struck in on this the thought that matter is as really awful and unknown as spirit, that science itself but dallies on the threshold, scarcely gaining more than a glimpse of the wonders of the inner place.

There is one day that stands up from amidst the others as a grim red beacon, betokening evil to come. I was sitting on a bench in the garden, watching the boy Cradock weeding, when I was suddenly alarmed by a harsh and choking sound, like the cry of a wild beast in anguish, and I was unspeakably shocked to see the unfortunate lad standing in full view before me, his whole body quivering and shaking at short intervals as though shocks of electricity were passing through him, his teeth grinding, foam gathering on his lips, and his face all swollen and blackened to a hideous mask of humanity. I shrieked with terror, and Professor Gregg came running; and as I pointed to Cradock, the boy with one convulsive shudder fell face forward, and lay on the wet earth, his body writhing like a wounded blind-worm, and an inconceivable babble of sounds bursting and rattling and hissing from his lips. He seemed to pour forth an infamous jargon, with words, or what seemed words, that might have belonged to a tongue dead since untold ages and buried deep beneath Nilotic mud, or in the inmost re-

cesses of the Mexican forest. For a moment the thought passed through my mind, as my ears were still revolted with that infernal clamour, "Surely this is the very speech of hell," and then I cried out again and again, and ran away shuddering to my inmost soul. I had seen Professor Gregg's face as he stooped over the wretched boy and raised him, and I was appalled by the glow of exultation that shone on every lineament and feature. As I sat in my room with drawn blinds, and my eyes hidden in my hands, I heard heavy steps beneath, and I was told afterwards that Professor Gregg had carried Cradock to his study, and had locked the door. I heard voices murmur indistinctly, and I trembled to think of what might be passing within a few feet of where I sat; I longed to escape to the woods and sunshine, and yet I dreaded the sights that might confront me on the way; and at last, as I held the handle of the door nervously, I heard Professor Gregg's voice calling to me with a cheerful ring. "It's all right now, Miss Lally," he said. "The poor fellow has got over it, and I have been arranging for him to sleep here after to-morrow. Perhaps I may be able to do something for him."

"Yes," he said later, "it was a very painful sight, and I don't wonder you were alarmed. We may hope that good food will build him up a little, but I am afraid he will never be really cured," and he affected the dismal and conventional air with which one speaks of hopeless illness; and yet beneath it I detected the delight that leapt up rampant within him, and fought and struggled to find utterance. It was as if one glanced down on the even surface of the sea, clear and immobile, and saw beneath raging depths and a storm of contending billows. It was indeed to me a torturing and offensive problem that this man, who had so bounteously rescued me from the sharpness of death, and showed himself in all the relations of life full of benevolence, and pity, and kindly forethought, should so manifestly be for once on the side of the demons, and take a ghastly pleasure in the torments of an afflicted fellow-creature. Apart, I struggled with the horned difficulty, and strove to find the solution; but without the hint of a clue, beset by mystery and contradiction, I saw nothing that might help me, and began to wonder whether, after all, I had not escaped from the white mist of the suburb at too dear a rate. I hinted something of my thought to the professor; I said enough to let him know that I was in the most acute perplexity, but the moment after regretted what I had done when I saw his face contort with a spasm of pain.

"My dear Miss Lally," he said, "you surely do not wish to leave us? No, no you would not do it. You do not know how I rely on you; how confidently I go forward, assured that you are here to watch over my children. You, Miss Lally, are my rearguard; for let me tell you the business in which I am engaged is not wholly devoid of peril. You have not forgotten what I said the first morning here; my lips are shut by an old and firm resolve till they can open to utter no ingenious hypothesis or vague surmise, but irrefragable fact, as certain as a demonstration in mathematics. Think over it, Miss Lally; not for a moment would I endeavour to keep you here against your own instincts, and yet I tell you

frankly that I am persuaded it is here, here amidst the woods, that your duty lies."

I was touched by the eloquence of his tone, and by the remembrance that the man, after all, had been my salvation, and I gave him my hand on a promise to serve him loyally and without question. A few days later the rector of our church —a little church, grey and severe and quaint, that hovered on the very banks of the river and watched the tides swim and return—came to see us, and Professor Gregg easily persuaded him to stay and share our dinner. Mr. Meyrick was a member of an antique family of squires, whose old manor-house stood amongst the hills some seven miles away, and thus rooted in the soil, the rector was a living store of all the old fading customs and lore of the country. His manner, genial, with a deal of retired oddity, won on Professor Gregg; and towards the cheese, when a curious Burgundy had begun its incantations, the two men glowed like the wine, and talked of philology with the enthusiasm of a burgess over the peerage. The parson was expounding the pronunciation of the Welsh *ll*, and producing sounds like the gurgle of his native brooks, when Professor Gregg struck in.

"By the way," he said, "that was a very odd word I met with the other day. You know my boy, poor Jervase Cradock? Well, he has got the bad habit of talking to himself, and the day before yesterday I was walking in the garden here and heard him; he was evidently quite unconscious of my presence. A lot of what he said I couldn't make out, but one word struck me distinctly. It was such an odd sound, half sibilant, half guttural, and as quaint as those double *l's* you have been demonstrating. I do not know whether I can give you an idea of the sound; 'Ishakshar' is perhaps as near as I can get. But the *k* ought to be a Greek *chi* or a Spanish *j*. Now what does it mean in Welsh?"

"In Welsh?" said the parson. "There is no such word in Welsh, nor any word remotely resembling it. I know the book-Welsh, as they call it, and the colloquial dialects as well as any man, but there's no word like that from Anglesea to Usk. Besides, none of the Cradocks speak a word of Welsh; it's dying out about here."

"Really. You interest me extremely, Mr. Meyrick. I confess the word didn't strike me as having the Welsh ring. But I thought it might be some local corruption."

"No, I never heard such a word, or anything like it. Indeed," he added, smiling whimsically, "if it belongs to any language, I should say it must be that of the fairies—the Tylwydd Têg, as we call them."

The talk went on to the discovery of a Roman villa in the neighbourhood; and soon after I left the room, and sat down apart to wonder at the drawing together of such strange clues of evidence. As the professor had spoken of the curious word, I had caught the glint of his eye upon me; and though the pronunciation he gave was grotesque in the extreme, I recognized the name of the stone of sixty characters mentioned by Solinus, the black seal shut up in some secret drawer of the study, stamped for ever by a vanished race with signs that

no man could read, signs that might, for all I knew, be the veils of awful things done long ago, and forgotten before the hills were moulded into form.

When the next morning I came down, I found Professor Gregg pacing the terrace in his eternal walk.

"Look at that bridge," he said, when he saw me; "observe the quaint and Gothic design, the angles between the arches, and the silvery grey of the stone in the awe of the morning light. I confess it seems to me symbolic; it should illustrate a mystical allegory of the passage from one world to another."

"Professor Gregg," I said quietly, "it is time that I knew something of what has happened, and of what is to happen."

For the moment he put me off, but I returned again with the same question in the evening, and then Professor Gregg flamed with excitement. "Don't you understand yet?" he cried. "But I have told you a good deal; yes, and shown you a good deal; you have heard pretty nearly all that I have heard, and seen what I have seen; or at least," and his voice chilled as he spoke, "enough to make a good deal clear as noonday. The servants told you, I have no doubt, that the wretched boy Cradock had another seizure the night before last; he awoke me with cries in that voice you heard in the garden, and I went to him, and God forbid you should see what I saw that night. But all this is useless; my time here is drawing to a close; I must be back in town in three weeks, as I have a course of lectures to prepare, and need all my books about me. In a very few days it will be all over, and I shall no longer hint, and no longer be liable to ridicule as a madman and a quack. No, I shall speak plainly, and I shall be heard with such emotions as perhaps no other man has ever drawn from the breasts of his fellows."

He paused, and seemed to grow radiant with the joy of great and wonderful discovery.

"But all that is for the future, the near future certainly, but still the future," he went on at length. "There is something to be done yet; you will remember my telling you that my researches were not altogether devoid of peril? Yes, there is a certain amount of danger to be faced; I did not know how much when I spoke on the subject before, and to a certain extent I am still in the dark. But it will be a strange adventure, the last of all, the last demonstration in the chain."

He was walking up and down the room as he spoke, and I could hear in his voice the contending tones of exultation and despondence, or perhaps I should say awe, the awe of a man who goes forth on unknown waters, and I thought of his allusion to Columbus on the night he had laid his book before me. The evening was a little chilly, and a fire of logs had been lighted in the study where we were; the remittent flame and the glow on the walls reminded me of the old days. I was sitting silent in an armchair by the fire, wondering over all I had heard, and still vainly speculating as to the secret springs concealed from me under all the phantasmagoria I had witnessed, when I became suddenly aware of a sensation that change of some sort had been at work in the room, and that there was something unfamiliar in its aspect. For some time I looked about me, trying in vain to localize the alteration that I knew had been made; the table by

the window, the chairs, the faded settee were all as I had known them. Suddenly, as a sought-for recollection flashes into the mind, I knew what was amiss. I was facing the professor's desk, which stood on the other side of the fire, and above the desk was a grimy-looking bust of Pitt, that I had never seen there before. And then I remembered the true position of this work of art; in the farthest corner by the door was an old cupboard, projecting into the room, and on the top of the cupboard, fifteen feet from the floor, the bust had been, and there, no doubt, it had delayed, accumulating dirt, since the early days of the century.

I was utterly amazed, and sat silent, still in a confusion of thought. There was, so far as I knew, no such thing as a step-ladder in the house, for I had asked for one to make some alterations in the curtains of my room, and a tall man standing on a chair would have found it impossible to take down the bust. It had been placed, not on the edge of the cupboard, but far back against the wall; and Professor Gregg was, if anything, under the average height.

"How on earth did you manage to get down Pitt?" I said at last.

The professor looked curiously at me, and seemed to hesitate a little.

"They must have found you a step-ladder, or perhaps the gardener brought in a short ladder from outside?"

"No, I have had no ladder of any kind. Now, Miss Lally," he went on with an awkward simulation of jest, "there is a little puzzle for you; a problem in the manner of the inimitable Holmes; there are the facts, plain and patent: summon your acuteness to the solution of the puzzle. For Heaven's sake," he cried with a breaking voice, "say no more about it! I tell you, I never touched the thing," and he went out of the room with horror manifest on his face, and his hand shook and jarred the door behind him.

I looked round the room in vague surprise, not at all realizing what had happened, making vain and idle surmises by way of explanation, and wondering at the stirring of black waters by an idle word and the trivial change of an ornament. "This is some petty business, some whim on which I have jarred," I reflected; "the professor is perhaps scrupulous and superstitious over trifles, and my question may have outraged unacknowledged fears, as though one killed a spider or spilled the salt before the very eyes of a practical Scotchwoman." I was immersed in these fond suspicions, and began to plume myself a little on my immunity from such empty fears, when the truth fell heavily as lead upon my heart, and I recognized with cold terror that some awful influence had been at work. The bust was simply inaccessible; without a ladder no one could have touched it.

I went out to the kitchen and spoke as quietly as I could to the housemaid.

"Who moved that bust from the top of the cupboard, Anne?" I said to her. "Professor Gregg says he has not touched it. Did you find an old step-ladder in one of the outhouses?"

The girl looked at me blankly.

"I never touched it," she said. "I found it where it is now the other morning when I dusted the room. I remember now, it was Wednesday morning, because it was the morning after Cradock was taken bad in the night. My room is next to

his, you know, miss," the girl went on piteously, "and it was awful to hear how he cried and called out names that I couldn't understand. It made me feel all afraid! and then master came, and I heard him speak, and he took down Cradock to the study and gave him something."

"And you found that bust moved the next morning?"

"Yes, miss. There was a queer sort of smell in the study when I came down and opened the windows; a bad smell it was, and I wondered what it could be. Do you know, miss, I went a long time ago to the Zoo in London with my cousin Thomas Barker, one afternoon that I had off, when I was at Mrs. Prince's in Stanhope Gate, and we went into the snake-house to see the snakes, and it was just the same sort of smell; very sick it made me feel, I remember, and I got Barker to take me out. And it was just the same kind of smell in the study, as I was saying, and I was wondering what it could be from, when I see that bust with Pitt cut in it, standing on the master's desk, and I thought to myself, 'Now who has done that, and how have they done it?' And when I came to dust the things, I looked at the dust, and I saw a great mark on it where the dust was gone, for I don't think it can have been touched with a duster for years and years, and it wasn't like finger-marks, but a large patch like, broad and spread out. So I passed my hand over it, without thinking what I was doing, and where that patch was it was all sticky and slimy, as if a snail had crawled over it. Very strange, isn't it, miss? and I wonder who can have done it, and how that mess was made."

The well-meant gabble of the servant touched me to the quick; I lay down upon my bed, and bit my lip that I should not cry out loud in the sharp anguish of my terror and bewilderment. Indeed, I was almost mad with dread; I believe that if it had been daylight I should have fled hot foot, forgetting all courage and all the debt of gratitude that was due to Professor Gregg, not caring whether my fate were that I must starve slowly, so long as I might escape from the net of blind and panic fear that every day seemed to draw a little closer round me. If I knew, I thought, if I knew what there were to dread, I could guard against it; but here, in this lonely house, shut in on all sides by the olden woods and the vaulted hills, terror seems to spring inconsequent from every covert, and the flesh is aghast at the half-hearted murmurs of horrible things. All in vain I strove to summon scepticism to my aid, and endeavoured by cool common sense to buttress my belief in a world of natural order, for the air that blew in at the open window was a mystic breath, and in the darkness I felt the silence go heavy and sorrowful as a mass of requiem, and I conjured images of strange shapes gathering fast amidst the reeds, beside the wash of the river.

In the morning from the moment that I set foot in the breakfast-room, I felt that the unknown plot was drawing to a crisis; the professor's face was firm and set, and he seemed hardly to hear our voices when we spoke.

"I am going out for a rather long walk," he said, when the meal was over. "You mustn't be expecting me, now, or thinking anything has happened if I don't turn up to dinner. I have been getting stupid lately, and I dare say a minia-

ture walking tour will do me good. Perhaps I may even spend the night in some little inn, if I find any place that looks clean and comfortable."

I heard this, and knew by my experience of Professor Gregg's manner that it was no ordinary business or pleasure that impelled him. I knew not, nor even remotely guessed, where he was bound, nor had I the vaguest notion of his errand, but all the fear of the night before returned; and as he stood, smiling, on the terrace, ready to set out, I implored him to stay, and to forget all his dreams of the undiscovered continent.

"No, no, Miss Lally," he replied, still smiling, "it's too late now. *Vestigia nulla retrorsum*, you know, is the device of all true explorers, though I hope it won't be literally true in my case. But, indeed, you are wrong to alarm yourself so; I look upon my little expedition as quite commonplace; no more exciting than a day with the geological hammers. There is a risk, of course, but so there is on the commonest excursion. I can afford to be jaunty; I am doing nothing so hazardous as 'Arry does a hundred times over in the course of every Bank Holiday. Well, then, you must look more cheerfully; and so good-bye till to-morrow at latest."

He walked briskly up the road, and I saw him open the gate that marks the entrance of the wood, and then he vanished in the gloom of the trees.

All the day passed heavily with a strange darkness in the air, and again I felt as if imprisoned amidst the ancient woods, shut in an olden land of mystery and dread, and as if all was long ago and forgotten by the living outside. I hoped and dreaded; and when the dinner-hour came I waited, expecting to hear the professor's step in the hall, and his voice exulting at I knew not what triumph. I composed my face to welcome him gladly, but the night descended dark, and he did not come.

In the morning, when the maid knocked at my door, I called out to her, and asked if her master had returned; and when she replied that his bedroom door stood open and empty, I felt the cold clasp of despair. Still, I fancied he might have discovered genial company, and would return for luncheon, or perhaps in the afternoon, and I took the children for a walk in the forest, and tried my best to play and laugh with them, and to shut out the thoughts of mystery and veiled terror. Hour after hour I waited, and my thoughts grew darker; again the night came and found me watching, and at last, as I was making much ado to finish my dinner, I heard steps outside and the sound of a man's voice.

The maid came in and looked oddly at me. "Please, miss," she began, "Mr. Morgan, the gardener, wants to speak to you for a minute, if you didn't mind."

"Show him in, please," I answered, and I set my lips tight.

The old man came slowly into the room, and the servant shut the door behind him.

"Sit down, Mr. Morgan," I said; "what is it that you want to say to me?"

"Well, miss, Mr. Gregg he gave me something for you yesterday morning, just before he went off; and he told me particular not to hand it up before eight o'clock this evening exactly, if so be as he wasn't back again home before, and if he should come home before I was just to return it to him in his own hands.

So, you see, as Mr. Gregg isn't here, yet, I suppose I'd better give you the parcel directly."

He pulled out something from his pocket, and gave it to me, half rising. I took it silently, and seeing that Morgan seemed doubtful as to what he was to do next, I thanked him and bade him good night, and he went out. I was left alone in the room with the parcel in my hand—a paper parcel, neatly sealed and directed to me, with the instructions Morgan had quoted, all written in the professor's large, loose hand. I broke the seals with a choking at my heart, and found an envelope inside, addressed also, but open, and I took the letter out.

"My dear Miss Lally," it began,—"To quote the old logic manual, the case of your reading this note is a case of my having made a blunder of some sort, and, I am afraid, a blunder that turns these lines into a farewell. It is practically certain that neither you nor any one else will ever see me again. I have made my will with provision for this eventuality, and I hope you will consent to accept the small remembrance addressed to you, and my sincere thanks for the way in which you joined your fortunes to mine. The fate which has come upon me is desperate and terrible beyond the remotest dreams of man; but this fate you have a right to know—if you please. If you look in the left-hand drawer of my dressing-table, you will find the key of the escritoire, properly labelled. In the well of the escritoire is a large envelope sealed and addressed to your name. I advise you to throw it forthwith into the fire; you will sleep better of nights if you do so. But if you must know the history of what has happened, it is all written down for you to read."

The signature was firmly written below, and again I turned the page and read out the words one by one, aghast and white to the lips, my hands cold as ice, and sickness choking me. The dead silence of the room, and the thought of the dark woods and hills closing me in on every side, oppressed me, helpless and without capacity, and not knowing where to turn for counsel. At last I resolved that though knowledge should haunt my whole life and all the days to come, I must know the meaning of the strange terrors that had so long tormented me, rising grey, dim and awful, like the shadows in the wood at dusk. I carefully carried out Professor Gregg's directions, and not without reluctance broke the seal of the envelope, and spread out his manuscript before me. That manuscript I always carry with me, and I see that I cannot deny your unspoken request to read it. This, then, was what I read that night, sitting at the desk, with a shaded lamp beside me.

The young lady who called herself Miss Lally then proceeded to recite:

THE STATEMENT OF WILLIAM GREGG, F.R.S., ETC.

It is many years since the first glimmer of the theory which is now almost, if not quite, reduced to fact dawned on my mind. A somewhat extensive course of miscellaneous and obsolete reading had done a great deal to prepare the way, and, later, when I became somewhat of a specialist, and immersed myself in

the studies known as ethnological, I was now and then startled by facts that would not square with orthodox scientific opinion, and by discoveries that seemed to hint at something still hidden for all our research. More particularly I became convinced that much of the folk-lore of the world is but an exaggerated account of events that really happened, and I was especially drawn to consider the stories of the fairies, the good folk of the Celtic races. Here, I thought I could detect the fringe of embroidery and exaggeration, the fantastic guise, the little people dressed in green and gold sporting in the flowers, and I thought I saw a distinct analogy between the name given to this race (supposed to be imaginary) and the description of their appearance and manners. Just as our remote ancestors called the dreaded beings "fair" and "good" precisely because they dreaded them, so they had dressed them up in charming forms, knowing the truth to be the very reverse. Literature, too, had gone early to work, and had lent a powerful hand in the transformation, so that the playful elves of Shakespeare are already far removed from the true original, and the real horror is disguised in a form of prankish mischief. But in the older tales, the stories that used to make men cross themselves as they sat around the burning logs, we tread a different stage; I saw a widely opposed spirit in certain histories of children and of men and women who vanished strangely from the earth. They would be seen by a peasant in the fields walking towards some green and rounded hillock, and seen no more on earth; and there are stories of mothers who have left a child quietly sleeping, with the cottage door rudely barred with a piece of wood, and have returned, not to find the plump and rosy little Saxon, but a thin and wizened creature, with sallow skin and black, piercing eyes, the child of another race. Then, again, there were myths darker still; the dread of witch and wizard, the lurid evil of the Sabbath, and the hint of demons who mingled with the daughters of men. And just as we have turned the terrible "fair folk" into a company of benignant, if freakish elves, so we have hidden from us the black foulness of the witch and her companions under a popular *diablerie* of old women and broomsticks, and a comic cat with tail on end. So the Greeks called the hideous furies benevolent ladies, and thus the northern nations have followed their example. I pursued my investigations, stealing odd hours from other and more imperative labours, and I asked myself the question: Supposing these traditions to be true, who were the demons who are reported to have attended the Sabbaths? I need not say that I laid aside what I may call the supernatural hypothesis of the Middle Ages, and came to the conclusion that fairies and evils were of one and the same race and origin; invention, no doubt, and the Gothic fancy of old days, had done much in the way of exaggeration and distortion; yet I firmly believe that beneath all this imagery there was a black background of truth. As for some of the alleged wonders, I hesitated. While I should be very loath to receive any one specific instance of modern spiritualism as containing even a grain of the genuine, yet I was not wholly prepared to deny that human flesh may now and then, once perhaps in ten million cases, be the veil of powers which seem magical to us—powers which, so far from proceeding from the heights and leading men thither, are in reality survivals from the depths of being. The

amœba and the snail have powers which we do not possess; and I thought it possible that the theory of reversion might explain many things which seem wholly inexplicable. Thus stood my position; I saw good reason to believe that much of the tradition, a vast deal of the earliest and uncorrupted tradition of the so-called fairies, represented solid fact, and I thought that the purely supernatural element in these traditions was to be accounted for on the hypothesis that a race which had fallen out of the grand march of evolution might have retained, as a survival, certain powers which would be to us wholly miraculous. Such was my theory as it stood conceived in my mind; and working with this in view, I seemed to gather confirmation from every side, from the spoils of a tumulus or a barrow, from a local paper reporting an antiquarian meeting in the country, and from general literature of all kinds. Amongst other instances, I remember being struck by the phrase "articulate-speaking men" in Homer, as if the writer knew or had heard of men whose speech was so rude that it could hardly be termed articulate; and on my hypothesis of a race who had lagged far behind the rest, I could easily conceive that such a folk would speak a jargon but little removed from the inarticulate noises of brute beasts.

Thus I stood, satisfied that my conjecture was at all events not far removed from fact, when a chance paragraph in a small country print one day arrested my attention. It was a short account of what was to all appearance the usual sordid tragedy of the village—a young girl unaccountably missing, and evil rumour blatant and busy with her reputation. Yet I could read between the lines that all this scandal was purely hypothetical, and in all probability invented to account for what was in any other manner unaccountable. A flight to London or Liverpool, or an undiscovered body lying with a weight about its neck in the foul depths of a woodland pool, or perhaps murder—such were the theories of the wretched girl's neighbours. But as I idly scanned the paragraph, a flash of thought passed through me with the violence of an electric shock: what if the obscure and horrible race of the hills still survived, still remained haunting wild places and barren hills, and now and then repeating the evil of Gothic legend, unchanged and unchangeable as the Turanian Shelta, or the Basques of Spain? I have said that the thought came with violence; and indeed I drew in my breath sharply, and clung with both hands to my elbow-chair, in a strange confusion of horror and elation. It was as if one of my *confrères* of physical science, roaming in a quiet English wood, had been suddenly stricken aghast by the presence of the slimy and loathsome terror of the ichthyosaurus, the original of the stories of the awful worms killed by valorous knights, or had seen the sun darkened by the pterodactyl, the dragon of tradition. Yet as a resolute explorer of knowledge, the thought of such a discovery threw me into a passion of joy, and I cut out the slip from the paper and put it in a drawer in my old bureau, resolved that it should be but the first piece in a collection of the strangest significance. I sat long that evening dreaming of the conclusions I should establish, nor did cooler reflection at first dash my confidence. Yet as I began to put the case fairly, I saw that I might be building on an unstable foundation; the facts might possibly be in accordance with local opinion, and I regarded the affair

with a mood of some reserve. Yet I resolved to remain perched on the look-out, and I hugged to myself the thought that I alone was watching and wakeful, while the great crowd of thinkers and searchers stood heedless and indifferent, perhaps letting the most prerogative facts pass by unnoticed.

Several years elapsed before I was enabled to add to the contents of the drawer; and the second find was in reality not a valuable one, for it was a mere repetition of the first, with only the variation of another and distant locality. Yet I gained something, for in the second case, as in the first, the tragedy took place in a desolate and lonely country, and so far my theory seemed justified. But the third piece was to me far more decisive. Again, amongst outland hills, far even from a main road of traffic, an old man was found done to death, and the instrument of execution was left beside him. Here, indeed, there were rumour and conjecture, for the deadly tool was a primitive stone axe, bound by gut to the wooden handle, and surmises the most extravagant and improbable were indulged in. Yet, as I thought with a kind of glee, the wildest conjectures went far astray; and I took the pains to enter into correspondence with the local doctor, who was called at the inquest. He, a man of some acuteness, was dumfounded. "It will not do to speak of these things in country places," he wrote to me; "but frankly, there is some hideous mystery here. I have obtained possession of the stone axe, and have been so curious as to test its powers. I took it into the back-garden of my house one Sunday afternoon when my family and the servants were all out, and there, sheltered by the poplar hedges, I made my experiments. I found the thing utterly unmanageable; whether there is some peculiar balance, some nice adjustment of weights, which require incessant practice, or whether an effectual blow can be struck only by a certain trick of the muscles, I do not know; but I assure you that I went into the house with but a sorry opinion of my athletic capacities. It was like an inexperienced man trying 'putting the hammer'; the force exerted seemed to return on oneself, and I found myself hurled backwards with violence, while the axe fell harmless to the ground. On another occasion I tried the experiment with a clever woodman of the place; but this man, who had handled his axe for forty years, could do nothing with the stone implement, and missed every stroke most ludicrously. In short, if it were not so supremely absurd, I should say that for four thousand years no one on earth could have struck an effective blow with the tool that undoubtedly was used to murder the old man." This, as may be imagined, was to me rare news; and afterwards, when I heard the whole story, and learned that the unfortunate old man had babbled tales of what might be seen at night on a certain wild hillside, hinting at unheard-of wonders, and that he had been found cold one morning on the very hill in question, my exultation was extreme, for I felt I was leaving conjecture far behind me. But the next step was of still greater importance. I had possessed for many years an extraordinary stone seal —a piece of dull black stone, two inches long from the handle to the stamp, and the stamping end a rough hexagon an inch and a quarter in diameter. Altogether, it presented the appearance of an enlarged tobacco stopper of an old-fashioned make. It had been sent to me by an agent in the East, who informed me that

it had been found near the site of the ancient Babylon. But the characters engraved on the seal were to me an intolerable puzzle. Somewhat of the cuneiform pattern, there were yet striking differences, which I detected at the first glance, and all efforts to read the inscription on the hypothesis that the rules for deciphering the arrow-headed writing would apply proved futile. A riddle such as this stung my pride, and at odd moments I would take the Black Seal out of the cabinet, and scrutinize it with so much idle perseverance that every letter was familiar to my mind, and I could have drawn the inscription from memory without the slightest error. Judge, then, of my surprise when I one day received from a correspondent in the West of England a letter and an enclosure that positively left me thunderstruck. I saw carefully traced on a large piece of paper the very characters of the Black Seal, without alteration of any kind, and above the inscription my friend had written: *Inscription found on a limestone rock on the Grey Hills, Monmouthshire. Done in some red earth, and quite recent.* I turned to the letter. My friend wrote: "I send you the enclosed inscription with all due reserve. A shepherd who passed by the stone a week ago swears that there was then no mark of any kind. The characters, as I have noted, are formed by drawing some red earth over the stone, and are of an average height of one inch. They look to me like a kind of cuneiform character, a good deal altered, but this, of course, is impossible. It may be either a hoax, or more probably some scribble of the gipsies, who are plentiful enough in this wild country. They have, as you are aware, many hieroglyphics which they use in communicating with one another. I happened to visit the stone in question two days ago in connection with a rather painful incident which has occurred here."

As it may be supposed, I wrote immediately to my friend, thanking him for the copy of the inscription, and asking him in a casual manner the history of the incident he mentioned. To be brief, I heard that a woman named Cradock, who had lost her husband a day before, had set out to communicate the sad news to a cousin who lived some five miles away. She took a short cut which led by the Grey Hills. Mrs. Cradock, who was then quite a young woman, never arrived at her relative's house. Late that night a farmer, who had lost a couple of sheep, supposed to have wandered from the flock, was walking over the Grey Hills, with a lantern and his dog. His attention was attracted by a noise, which he described as a kind of wailing, mournful and pitiable to hear; and, guided by the sound, he found the unfortunate Mrs. Cradock crouched on the ground by the limestone rock, swaying her body to and fro, and lamenting and crying in so heart-rending a manner that the farmer was, as he says, at first obliged to stop his ears, or he would have run away. The woman allowed herself to be taken home, and a neighbour came to see to her necessities. All the night she never ceased her crying, mixing her lament with words of some unintelligible jargon, and when the doctor arrived he pronounced her insane. She lay on her bed for a week, now wailing, as people said, like one lost and damned for eternity, and now sunk in a heavy coma; it was thought that grief at the loss of her husband had unsettled her mind, and the medical man did not at one time expect her to live. I need not say that I was deeply interested in this story, and I made my friend

write to me at intervals with all the particulars of the case. I heard then that in the course of six weeks the woman gradually recovered the use of her faculties, and some months later she gave birth to a son, christened Jervase, who unhappily proved to be of weak intellect. Such were the facts known to the village; but to me, while I whitened at the suggested thought of the hideous enormities that had doubtless been committed, all this was nothing short of conviction, and I incautiously hazarded a hint of something like the truth to some scientific friends. The moment the words had left my lips I bitterly regretted having spoken, and thus given away the great secret of my life, but with a good deal of relief mixed with indignation I found my fears altogether misplaced, for my friends ridiculed me to my face, and I was regarded as a madman; and beneath a natural anger I chuckled to myself, feeling as secure amidst these blockheads as if I had confided what I knew to the desert sands.

But now, knowing so much, I resolved I would know all, and I concentrated my efforts on the task of deciphering the inscription on the Black Seal. For many years I made this puzzle the sole object of my leisure moments, for the greater portion of my time was, of course, devoted to other duties, and it was only now and then that I could snatch a week of clear research. If I were to tell the full history of this curious investigation, this statement would be wearisome in the extreme, for it would contain simply the account of long and tedious failure. By what I knew already of ancient scripts I was well equipped for the chase, as I always termed it to myself. I had correspondents amongst all the scientific men in Europe, and, indeed, in the world, and I could not believe that in these days any character, however ancient and however perplexed, could long resist the search-light I should bring to bear upon it. Yet in point of fact, it was fully fourteen years before I succeeded. With every year my professional duties increased, and my leisure became smaller. This no doubt retarded me a good deal; and yet, when I look back on those years, I am astonished at the vast scope of my investigation of the Black Seal. I made my bureau a centre, and from all the world and from all the ages I gathered transcripts of ancient writing. Nothing, I resolved, should pass me unawares, and the faintest hint should be welcomed and followed up. But as one covert after another was tried and proved empty of result, I began in the course of years to despair, and to wonder whether the Black Seal were the sole relic of some race that had vanished from the world, and left no other trace of its existence—had perished, in fine, as Atlantis is said to have done, in some great cataclysm, its secrets perhaps drowned beneath the ocean or moulded into the heart of the hills. The thought chilled my warmth a little, and though I still persevered, it was no longer with the same certainty of faith. A chance came to the rescue. I was staying in a considerable town in the North of England, and took the opportunity of going over the very creditable museum that had for some time been established in the place. The curator was one of my correspondents; and, as we were looking through one of the mineral cases, my attention was struck by a specimen, a piece of black stone some four inches square, the appearance of which reminded me in a measure of the Black Seal. I took it up carelessly, and was turning it over in my hand, when I saw, to

my astonishment, that the under side was inscribed. I said, quietly enough, to my friend the curator that the specimen interested me, and that I should be much obliged if he would allow me to take it with me to my hotel for a couple of days. He, of course, made no objection, and I hurried to my rooms and found that my first glance had not deceived me. There were two inscriptions; one in the regular cuneiform character, another in the character of the Black Seal, and I realized that my task was accomplished. I made an exact copy of the two inscriptions; and when I got to my London study, and had the Seal before me, I was able seriously to grapple with the great problem. The interpreting inscription on the museum specimen, though in itself curious enough, did not bear on my quest, but the transliteration made me master of the secret of the Black Seal. Conjecture, of course, had to enter into my calculations; there was here and there uncertainty about a particular ideograph, and one sign recurring again and again on the seal baffled me for many successive nights. But at last the secret stood open before me in plain English, and I read the key of the awful transmutation of the hills. The last word was hardly written, when with fingers all trembling and unsteady I tore the scrap of paper into the minutest fragments, and saw them flame and blacken in the red hollow of the fire; and then I crushed the grey films that remained into finest powder. Never since then have I written those words; never will I write the phrases which tell how man can be reduced to the slime from which he came, and be forced to put on the flesh of the reptile and the snake. There was now but one thing remaining. I knew, but I desired to see, and I was after some time able to take a house in the neighbourhood of the Grey Hills, and not far from the cottage where Mrs. Cradock and her son Jervase resided. I need not go into a full and detailed account of the apparently inexplicable events which have occurred here, where I am writing this. I knew that I should find in Jervase Cradock something of the blood of the "Little People," and I found later that he had more than once encountered his kinsmen in lonely places in that lonely land. When I was summoned one day to the garden, and found him in a seizure speaking or hissing the ghastly jargon of the Black Seal, I am afraid that exultation prevailed over pity. I heard bursting from his lips the secrets of the underworld, and the word of dread, "Ishakshar," the signification of which I must be excused from giving.

But there is one incident I cannot pass over unnoticed. In the waste hollow of the night I awoke at the sound of those hissing syllables I knew so well; and on going to the wretched boy's room, I found him convulsed and foaming at the mouth, struggling on the bed as if he strove to escape the grasp of writhing demons. I took him down to my room and lit the lamp, while he lay twisting on the floor, calling on the power within his flesh to leave him. I saw his body swell and become distended as a bladder, while the face blackened before my eyes; and then at the crisis I did what was necessary according to the directions on the Seal, and putting all scruple on one side, I became a man of Science, observant of what was passing. Yet the sight I had to witness was horrible, almost beyond the power of human conception and the most fearful fantasy. Something pushed out from the body there on the floor, and stretched forth a slimy, waver-

ing tentacle, across the room, grasped the bust upon the cupboard, and laid it down on my desk.

When it was over, and I was left to walk up and down all the rest of the night, white and shuddering, with sweat pouring from my flesh, I vainly tried to reason within myself: I said, truly enough, that I had seen nothing really supernatural, that a snail pushing out his horns and drawing them in was but an instance on a smaller scale of what I had witnessed; and yet horror broke through all such reasonings and left me shattered and loathing myself for the share I had taken in the night's work.

There is little more to be said. I am going now to the final trial and encounter; for I have determined that there shall be nothing wanting, and I shall meet the "Little People" face to face. I shall have the Black Seal and the knowledge of its secrets to help me, and if I unhappily do not return from my journey, there is no need to conjure up here a picture of the awfulness of my fate.

Pausing a little at the end of Professor Gregg's statement, Miss Lally continued her tale in the following words:

Such was the almost incredible story that the professor had left behind him. When I had finished reading it, it was late at night, but the next morning I took Morgan with me, and we proceeded to search the Grey Hills for some trace of the lost professor. I will not weary you with a description of the savage desolation of that tract of country, a tract of utterest loneliness, of bare green hills dotted over with grey limestone boulders, worn by the ravages of time into fantastic semblances of men and beasts. Finally, after many hours of weary searching, we found what I told you—the watch and chain, the purse, and the ring—wrapped in a piece of coarse parchment. When Morgan cut the gut that bound the parcel together, and I saw the professor's property, I burst into tears, but the sight of the dreaded characters of the Black Seal repeated on the parchment froze me to silent horror, and I think I understood for the first time the awful fate that had come upon my late employer.

I have only to add that Professor Gregg's lawyer treated my account of what had happened as a fairy tale, and refused even to glance at the documents I laid before him. It was he who was responsible for the statement that appeared in the public press, to the effect that Professor Gregg had been drowned, and that his body must have been swept into the open sea.

Miss Lally stopped speaking, and looked at Mr. Phillipps, with a glance of some inquiry. He, for his part, was sunken in a deep reverie of thought; and when he looked up and saw the bustle of the evening gathering in the square, men and women hurrying to partake of dinner, and crowds already besetting the music-halls, all the hum and press of actual life seemed unreal and visionary, a dream in the morning after an awakening.

Sax Rohmer

TCHÉRIAPIN

from TALES OF CHINATOWN

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1

THE ROSE

"Examine it closely," said the man in the unusual caped overcoat. "It will repay examination."

I held the little object in the palm of my hand, bending forward over the marble-topped table and looking down at it with deep curiosity. The babel of tongues so characteristic of Malay Jack's, and that mingled odour of stale spirits, greasy humanity, tobacco, cheap perfume, and opium, which distinguishes the establishment, faded from my ken. A sense of loneliness came to me.

Perhaps I should say that it became complete. I had grown conscious of its approach at the very moment that the cadaverous white-haired man had addressed me. There was a quality in his steadfast gaze and in his oddly pitched deep voice which from the first had wrapped me about—as though he were cloaking me in his queer personality and withdrawing me from the common plane.

Having stared for some moments at the object in my palm, I touched it gingerly; whereupon my acquaintance laughed—a short bass laugh.

"It looks fragile," he said. "But have no fear. It is nearly as hard as a diamond."

Thus encouraged, I took the thing up between finger and thumb, and held it before my eyes. For long enough I looked at it, and looking, my wonder grew. I thought that here was the most wonderful example of the lapidary's art which I had ever met with, East or West.

It was a tiny pink rose, no larger than the nail of my little finger. Stalk and leaves were there, and golden pollen lay in its delicate heart. Each fairy-petal blushed with June fire; the frail leaves were exquisitely green. Withal it was as hard and unbendable as a thing of steel.

"Allow me," said the masterful voice.

A powerful lens was passed by my acquaintance. I regarded the rose through the glass, and thereupon I knew, beyond doubt, that there was something phenomenal about the gem—if gem it were. I could plainly trace the veins and texture of every petal.

I suppose I looked somewhat startled. Although, baldly stated, the fact may not seem calculated to affrighten, in reality there was something so weird about

this unnatural bloom that I dropped it on the table. As I did so I uttered an exclamation; for in spite of the stranger's assurances on the point, I had by no means overcome my idea of the thing's fragility.

"Don't be alarmed," he said, meeting my startled gaze. "It would need a steam-hammer to do any serious damage."

He replaced the jewel in his pocket, and when I returned the lens to him he acknowledged it with a grave inclination of the head. As I looked into his sunken eyes, in which I thought lay a sort of sardonic merriment, the fantastic idea flashed through my mind that I had fallen into the clutches of an expert hypnotist who was amusing himself at my expense; that the miniature rose was a mere hallucination produced by the same means as the notorious Indian rope trick.

Then, looking around me at the cosmopolitan groups surrounding the many tables, and catching snatches of conversations dealing with subjects so diverse as the quality of whisky in Singapore, the frail beauty of Chinese maidens, and the ways of "bloody greasers," common sense reasserted itself.

I looked into the grey face of my acquaintance.

"I cannot believe," I said slowly, "that human ingenuity could so closely duplicate the handiwork of nature. Surely the gem is unique?—possibly one of those magical talismans of which we read in Eastern stories?"

My companion smiled.

"It is not a gem," he replied, "and whilst in a sense it is a product of human ingenuity, it is also the handiwork of nature."

I was badly puzzled, and doubtless revealed the fact, for the stranger laughed in his short fashion, and:

"I am not trying to mystify you," he assured me. "But the truth is so hard to believe sometimes that in the present case I hesitate to divulge it. Did you ever meet Tchériapin?"

This abrupt change of topic somewhat startled me, but nevertheless:

"I once heard him play," I replied. "Why do you ask the question?"

"For this reason: Tchériapin possessed the only other example of this art which so far as I am aware ever left the laboratory of the inventor. He occasionally wore it in his buttonhole."

"It is then a manufactured product of some sort?"

"As I have said, in a sense it is; but"—he drew the tiny exquisite ornament from his pocket again and held it up before me—"it is a natural bloom."

"What?"

"It is a natural bloom," replied my acquaintance, fixing his penetrating gaze upon me. "By a perfectly simple process invented by the cleverest chemist of his age it has been reduced to this gem-like state whilst retaining unimpaired every one of its natural beauties, every shade of its natural colour. You are incredulous?"

"On the contrary," I replied, "having examined it through a magnifying glass I had already assured myself that no human hand had fashioned it. You arouse my curiosity intensely. Such a process, with its endless possibilities, should be worth a fortune to the inventor."

The stranger nodded grimly and again concealed the rose in his pocket.

"You are right," he said; "and the secret died with the man who discovered it—in the great explosion at the Vortex Works in 1917. You recall it? The T.N.T. factory? It shook all London, and fragments were cast into three counties."

"I recall it perfectly well."

"You remember also the death of Dr. Kreener, the chief chemist? He died in an endeavor to save some of the work-people."

"I remember."

"He was the inventor of the process, but it was never put upon the market. He was a singular man, sir; as was once said of him: 'A Don Juan of science.' Dame Nature gave him her heart unwooed. He trifled with science as some men trifle with love, tossing aside with a smile discoveries which would have made another famous. This"—tapping his breast pocket—"was one of them."

"You astound me. Do I understand you to mean that Dr. Kreener had invented a process for reducing any form of plant life to this condition?"

"Almost any form," was the guarded reply. "And some forms of animal life."

"What!"

"If you like"—the stranger leaned forward and grasped my arm—"I will tell you the story of Dr. Kreener's last experiment."

I was now intensely interested. I had not forgotten the heroic death of the man concerning whose work this chance acquaintance of mine seemed to know so much. And in the cadaverous face of the stranger as he sat there regarding me fixedly there was a promise and an allurement. I stood on the verge of strange things; so that, looking into the deep-set eyes, once again I felt the cloak being drawn about me, and I resigned myself willingly to the illusion.

From the moment when he began to speak again until that when I rose and followed him from Malay Jack's, as I shall presently relate, I became oblivious of my surroundings. I lived and moved through those last fevered hours in the lives of Dr. Kreener, Tchériapin, the violinist, and that other tragic figure around whom the story centered. I append:

THE STRANGER'S STORY

I asked you (said the man in the caped coat) if you had ever seen Tchériapin, and you replied that you had once heard him play. Having once heard him play you will not have forgotten him. At that time, although war still raged, all musical London was asking where he had come from, and to what nation he belonged. Then when he disappeared it was variously reported, you will recall, that he had been shot as a spy and that he had escaped from England and was serving with the Austrian army. As to his parentage I can enlighten you in a measure. He was an Eurasian. His father was an aristocratic Chinaman, and his mother a Polish ballet-dancer—that was his parentage; but I would scarcely hesitate to affirm that he came from Hell; and I shall presently show you that he has certainly returned there.

You remember the strange stories current about him. The cunning ones said

that he had a clever press agent. This was true enough. One of the most prominent agents in London discovered him playing in a Paris cabaret. Two months later he was playing at the Queen's Hall, and musical London lay at his feet.

He had something of the personality of Paganini, as you remember, except that he was a smaller man; long, gaunt, yellowish hands and the face of a haggard Mephistopheles. The critics quarrelled about him, as critics only quarrel about real genius, and whilst one school proclaimed that Tchériapin had discovered an entirely new technique, a revolutionary system of violin playing, another school was equally positive in declaring that he could not play at all, that he was a mountebank, a trickster, whose proper place was in a variety theatre.

There were stories, too, that were never published—not only about Tchériapin, but concerning the Strad upon which he played. If all this atmosphere of mystery which surrounded the man had truly been the work of a press agent, then the agent must have been as great a genius as his client. But I can assure you that the stories concerning Tchériapin, true and absurd alike, were not inspired for business purposes; they grew up around him like fungi.

I can see him now, a lean, almost emaciated figure, with slow, sinuous movements, and a trick of glancing sideways with those dark, unfathomable, slightly oblique eyes. He could take up his bow in such a way as to create an atmosphere of electrical suspense. He was loathsome, yet fascinating. One's mental attitude towards him was one of defence, of being tensely on guard. Then he would play.

You have heard him play, and it is therefore unnecessary for me to attempt to describe the effect of that music. The only composition which ever bore his name—I refer to "The Black Mass"—affected me on every occasion when I heard it, as no other composition has ever done.

Perhaps it was Tchériapin's playing rather than the music itself which reached down into hitherto unplumbed depths within me, and awakened dark things which, unsuspected, lay there sleeping. I never heard "The Black Mass" played by anyone else; indeed, I am not aware that it was ever published. But had it been we should rarely hear it. Like Locke's music to *Macbeth* it bears an unpleasant reputation; to include it in any concert programme would be to court disaster. An idle superstition, perhaps, but there is much naïveté in the artistic temperament.

Men detested Tchériapin, yet when he chose he could win over his bitterest enemies. Women followed him as children followed the Pied Piper; he courted none, but was courted by all. He would glance aside with those black, slanting eyes, shrug in his insolent fashion, and turn away. And they would follow. God knows how many of them followed—whether through the dens of Limehouse or the more fashionable salons of vice in the West End—they followed—perhaps down to Hell. So much for Tchériapin.

At the time when the episode occurred to which I have referred, Dr. Kreener occupied a house in Regent's Park, to which, when his duties at the munition works allowed, he would sometimes retire at week-ends. He was a man of com-

plex personality. I think no one ever knew him thoroughly; indeed, I doubt if he knew himself.

He was hail-fellow-well-met with the painters, sculptors, poets and social reformers who have made of Soho a new Mecca. No movement in art was so modern that Dr. Kreener was not conversant with it; no development in Bolshevism so violent or so secret that Dr. Kreener could not speak of it complacently and with inside knowledge.

These were his Bohemian friends, these dreamers and schemers. Of this side of his life his scientific colleagues knew little or nothing, but in his hours of leisure at Regent's Park it was with these dreamers that he loved to surround himself rather than with his brethren of the laboratory. I think if Dr. Kreener had not been a great chemist he would have been a great painter, or perhaps a politician, or even a poet. Triumph was his birthright, and the fruits for which lesser men reached out in vain fell ripe into his hands.

The favourite meeting-place for these oddly assorted boon companions was the doctor's laboratory, which was divided from the house by a moderately large garden. Here on a Sunday evening one might meet the very "latest" composer, the sculptor bringing a new "message," or the man destined to supplant with the ballet the time-worn operatic tradition.

But whilst some of these would come and go, so that one could never count with certainty upon meeting them, there was one who never failed to be present when such an informal reception was held. Of him I must speak at greater length, for a reason which will shortly appear.

Andrews was the name by which he was known to the circles in which he moved. No one, from Sir John Tennier, the fashionable portrait painter, to Kruski, of the Russian ballet, disputed Andrews's right to be counted one of the elect. Yet it was known, nor did he trouble to hide the fact, that Andrews was employed at a large printing works in South London, designing advertisements. He was a great, red-bearded, unkempt Scotsman, and only once can I remember to have seen him strictly sober; but to hear him talk about painters and painting in his thick Caledonian accent was to look into the soul of an artist.

He was as sour as an unripe grape-fruit, cynical, embittered, a man savagely disappointed with life and the world; and tragedy was written all over him. If anyone knew the secret of his wasted life it was Dr. Kreener, and Dr. Kreener was a reliquary of so many secrets that this one was safe as if the grave had swallowed it.

One Sunday Tchériapin joined the party. That he would gravitate there sooner or later was inevitable, for the laboratory in the garden was a *kaaba* to which all such spirits made at least one pilgrimage. He had just set musical London on fire with his barbaric playing, and already those stories to which I have referred were creeping into circulation.

Although Dr. Kreener never expected anything of his guests beyond an interchange of ideas, it was a fact that the laboratory contained an almost unique collection of pencil and charcoal studies by famous artists, done upon the spot; of statuettes in wax, putty, soap, and other extemporized materials, by the newest

sculptors. Whilst often enough from the drawing-room which opened upon the other end of the garden had issued the strains of masterly piano-playing, and it was no uncommon thing for little groups to gather in the neighbouring road to listen, gratis, to the voice of some great vocalist.

From the first moment of their meeting an intense antagonism sprang up between Tchériapin and Andrews. Neither troubled very much to veil it. In Tchériapin it found expression in covert sneers and sidelong glances, whilst the big, lion-maned Scotsman snorted open contempt of the Eurasian violinist. However, what I was about to say was that Tchériapin on the occasion of his first visit brought his violin.

It was there, amid those incongruous surroundings, that I first had my spirit tortured by the strains of "The Black Mass."

There were five of us present, including Tchériapin, and not one of the four listeners was unaffected by the music. But the influence which it exercised upon Andrews was so extraordinary as almost to reach the phenomenal. He literally writhed in his chair, and finally interrupted the performance by staggering rather than walking out of the laboratory.

I remember that he upset a jar of acid in his stumbling exit. It flowed across the floor almost to the feet of Tchériapin, and the way in which the little black-haired man skipped, squealing, out of the path of the corroding fluid was curiously like that of a startled rabbit. Order was restored in due course, but we could not induce Tchériapin to play again, nor did Andrews return until the violinist had taken his departure. We found him in the dining-room, a nearly empty whisky-bottle beside him, and:

"I had to gang awa'," he explained thickly; "he was temptin' me to murder him. I should ha' had to do it if I had stayed. Damn his hell-music."

Tchériapin revisited Dr. Kreener on many occasions afterwards, although for a long time he did not bring his violin again. The doctor had prevailed upon Andrews to tolerate the Eurasian's company, and I could not help noticing how Tchériapin skilfully and deliberately goaded the Scotsman, seeming to take a fiendish delight in disagreeing with his pet theories, and in discussing any topic which he had found to be distasteful to Andrews.

Chief among these was that sort of irreverent criticism of women in which male parties so often indulge. Bitter cynic though he was, women were sacred to Andrews. To speak disrespectfully of a woman in his presence was like uttering blasphemy in the study of a cardinal. Tchériapin very quickly detected the Scotman's weakness, and one night he launched out into a series of amorous adventures which set Andrews writhing as he had writhed under the torture of "The Black Mass."

On this occasion the party was only a small one, comprising myself, Dr. Kreener, Andrews, and Tchériapin. I could feel the storm brewing, but was powerless to check it. How presently it was to break in tragic violence I could not foresee. Fate had not meant that I should foresee it.

Allowing for the free play of an extravagant artistic mind, Tchériapin's career on his own showing had been that of a callous blackguard. I began by being dis-

gusted and ended by being fascinated, not by the man's scandalous adventures, but by the scarcely human psychology of the narrator.

From Warsaw to Budapesth, Shanghai to Paris, and Cairo to London, he passed, leaving ruin behind him with a smile—airily flicking cigarette ash upon the floor to indicate the termination of each "episode."

Andrews watched him in a lowering way which I did not like at all. He had ceased to snort his scorn; indeed, for ten minutes or so he had uttered no word or sound; but there was something in the pose of his ungainly body which strangely suggested that of a great dog preparing to spring. Presently the violinist recalled what he termed a "charming idyll of Normandy."

"There is one poor fool in the world," he said, shrugging his slight shoulders, "who never knew how badly he should hate me. Ha! ha! of him I shall tell you. Do you remember, my friends, some few years ago, a picture that was published in Paris and London? Everybody bought it; everyone said: 'He is a made man, this fellow who can paint so fine.'"

"To what picture do you refer?" asked Dr. Kreener.

"It was called 'A Dream at Dawn.'"

As he spoke the words I saw Andrews start forward, and Dr. Kreener exchanged a swift glance with him. But the Scotsman, unseen by the vainglorious half-caste, shook his head fiercely.

The picture to which Tchériapin referred will, of course, be perfectly familiar to you. It had phenomenal popularity some eight years ago. Nothing was known of the painter—whose name was Colquhoun—and nothing has been seen of his work since. The original painting was never sold, and after a time this promising new artist was, of course, forgotten.

Presently Tchériapin continued:

"It is the figure of a slender girl—ah! angels of grace!—what a girl!" He kissed his hand rapturously. "She is posed bending gracefully forward, and looking down at her own lovely reflection in the water. It is a seashore, you remember, and the little ripples play about her ankles. The first blush of the dawn robes her white body in a transparent mantle of light. Ah! God's mercy! it was as she stood so, in a little cove of Normandy, that I saw her!"

He paused, rolling his dark eyes; and I could hear Andrews's heavy breathing; then:

"It was the 'new art'—the posing of the model not in a lighted studio, but in the scene to be depicted. And the fellow who painted her!—the man with the barbarous name! Bah! he was big—as big as our Mr. Andrews—and ugly—pooh! uglier than he! A moon-face, with cropped skull like a prize-fighter and no soul. But yes, he could paint. 'A Dream at Dawn' was genius—yes, some soul he must have had.

"He could paint, dear friends, but he could not love. Him I counted as—puff!"

He blew imaginary down into space.

"Her I sought out, and presently found. She told me, in those sweet stolen rambles along the shore, when the moonlight made her look like a Madonna,

that she was his inspiration—his art—his life. And she wept; she wept, and I kissed her tears away.

"To please her I waited until 'A Dream at Dawn' was finished. With the finish of the picture, finished also *his* dream of dawn—the moon-faced one's."

Tchériapin laughed, and lighted a fresh cigarette.

"Can you believe that a man could be so stupid? He never knew of my existence, this big, red booby. He never knew that I existed until—until 'his dream' had fled—with me! In a week we were in Paris, that dream-girl and I—in a month we had quarrelled. I always end these matters with a quarrel; it makes the complete finish. She struck me in the face—and I laughed. She turned and went away. We were tired of one another.

"Ah!" Again he airily kissed his hand. "There were others after I had gone. I heard for a time. But her memory is like a rose, fresh and fair and sweet. I am glad I can remember her so, and not as she afterwards became. That is the art of love. She killed herself with absinthe, my friends. She died in Marseilles in the first year of the great war."

Thus far Tchériapin had proceeded, and was in the act of airily flicking ash upon the floor, when, uttering a sound which I can only describe as a roar, Andrews hurled himself upon the smiling violinist.

His great red hands clutching Tchériapin's throat, the insane Scotsman, for insane he was at that moment, forced the other back upon the settee from which he had half arisen. In vain I sought to drag him away from the writhing body, but I doubt if any man could have relaxed that deadly grip. Tchériapin's eyes protruded hideously and his tongue lolled forth from his mouth. One could hear the breath whistling through his nostrils as Andrews silently, deliberately, squeezed the life out of him.

It all occupied only a few minutes, and then Andrews, slowly opening his rigidly crooked fingers, stood panting and looking down at the distorted face of the dead man.

For once in his life the Scotsman was sober, and turning to Dr. Kreener:

"I have waited seven long years for this," he said, "and I'll hang wi' contentment."

I can never forget the ensuing moments, in which, amid a horrible silence only broken by the ticking of a clock, and the heavy breathing of Colquhoun (so long known to us as Andrews) we stood watching the contorted body on the settee.

And as we watched, slowly the rigid limbs began to relax, and Tchériapin slid gently on to the floor, collapsing there with a soft thud, where he squatted like some hideous Buddha, resting back against the cushions, one spectral yellow hand upraised, the fingers still clutching a big gold tassel.

Andrews (for so I always think of him) was seized with a violent fit of trembling, and he dropped into the chair from which he had made that dreadful spring, muttering to himself and looking down wild-eyed at his twitching fingers. Then he began to laugh, high-pitched laughter, in little short peals.

"Here!" cried the doctor sharply. "Drop that!"

Crossing to Andrews he grasped him by the shoulders and shook him roughly.

The laughter ceased, and—

"Send for the police," said Andrews in a queer, shaky voice. "Dinna fear but I'm ready. I'm only sorry it happened here."

"You ought to be glad," said Dr. Kreener.

There was a covert meaning in the words—a fact which penetrated even to the dulled intelligence of the Scotsman, for he glanced up haggardly at his friend.

"You ought to be glad," repeated Dr. Kreener.

Turning, he walked to the laboratory door and locked it. He next lowered all the blinds.

"I pray that we have not been overlooked," he said, "but we must chance it."

He mixed a drink for Andrews and himself. His quiet decisive manner had had its effect, and Andrews was now more composed. Indeed, he seemed to be in a half-dazed condition; but he persistently kept his back turned to the crouching figure propped up against the settee.

"If you think you can follow me," said Dr. Kreener abruptly, "I will show you the result of a recent experiment."

Unlocking a cupboard he took out a tiny figure some two inches long by one inch high, mounted upon a polished wooden pedestal. It was that of a guinea-pig. The flaky fur gleamed like the finest silk, and one felt that the coat of the minute creature would be as floss to the touch; whereas in reality it possessed the rigidity of steel. Literally one could have done it little damage with a hammer. Its weight was extraordinary.

"I am learning new things about this process every day," continued Dr. Kreener, placing the little figure upon a table. "For instance, whilst it seems to operate uniformly upon vegetable matter, there are curious modifications where one applies it to animal and mineral substances. I have now definitely decided that the result of this particular enquiry must never be published. You, Colquhoun, I believe, possess an example of the process, a tiger lily, I think? I must ask you to return it to me. Our late friend, Tchériapin, wears a pink rose in his coat which I have treated in the same way. I am going to take the liberty of removing it."

He spoke in the hard, incisive manner which I had heard him use in the lecture theatre, and it was evident enough that his design was to prepare Andrews for something which he contemplated. Facing the Scotsman where he sat hunched up in the big armchair, dully watching the speaker:

"There is one experiment," said Dr. Kreener, speaking very deliberately, "which I have never before had a suitable opportunity of attempting. Of its result I am personally confident, but science always demands proof."

His voice rang now with a note of repressed excitement. He paused for a moment, and then:

"If you were to examine this little specimen very closely," he said, and rested his finger upon the tiny figure of the guinea-pig, "you would find that in one particular it is imperfect. Although a diamond drill would have to be employed

to demonstrate the fact, the animal's organs, despite their having undergone a chemical change quite new to science, are intact, perfect down to the smallest detail. One part of the creature's structure alone defied my process. In short, *dental enamel* is impervious to it. This little animal, otherwise as complete as when it lived and breathed, has no teeth. I found it necessary to extract them before submitting the body to the reductionary process."

He paused.

"Shall I go on?" he asked.

Andrews, to whose mind, I think, no conception of the doctor's project had yet penetrated, shuddered, but slowly nodded his head.

Dr. Kreener glanced across the laboratory at the crouching figure of Tchériapin, then, resting his hands upon Andrews's shoulders, he pushed him back in the chair and stared into his dull eyes.

"Brace yourself, Colquhoun," he said tersely.

Turning, he crossed to a small mahogany cabinet at the farther end of the room. Pulling out a glass tray he judicially selected a pair of dental forceps.

2

"THE BLACK MASS"

Thus far the stranger's appalling story had progressed when that singular cloak in which hypnotically he had enwrapped me seemed to drop, and I found myself clutching the edge of the table and staring into the grey face of the speaker.

I became suddenly aware of the babel of voices about me, of the noisome smell of Malay Jack's, and of the presence of Jack in person, who was enquiring if there were any further orders. I was conscious of nausea.

"Excuse me," I said, rising unsteadily, "but I fear the oppressive atmosphere is affecting me."

"If you prefer to go out," said my acquaintance, in that deep voice which throughout the dreadful story had rendered me oblivious of my surroundings, "I should be much favoured if you would accompany me to a spot not five hundred yards from here."

Seeing me hesitate:

"I have a particular reason for asking," he added.

"Very well," I replied, inclining my head, "if you wish it. But certainly I must seek the fresh air."

Going up the steps and out through the door above which the blue lantern burned, we came to the street, turned to the left, to the left again, and soon were threading that maze of narrow ways which complicates the map of Pennyfields.

I felt somewhat recovered. Here, in the narrow but familiar highways the spell of my singular acquaintance lost much of its potency, and I already found myself doubting the story of Dr. Kreener and Tchériapin. Indeed, I began to laugh at myself, conceiving that I had fallen into the hands of some comedian

who was making sport of me; although why such a person should visit Malay Jack's was not apparent.

I was about to give expression to these new and saner ideas when my companion paused before a door half hidden in a little alley which divided the back of a Chinese restaurant from the tawdry-looking establishment of a cigar merchant. He apparently held the key, for although I did not actually hear the turning of the lock I saw that he had opened the door.

"May I request you to follow me?" came his deep voice out of the darkness. "I will show you something which will repay your trouble."

Again the cloak touched me, but it was without entirely resigning myself to the compelling influence that I followed my mysterious acquaintance up an uncarpeted and nearly dark stair. On the landing above a gas lamp was burning, and opening a door immediately facing the stair the stranger conducted me into a barely furnished and untidy room.

The atmosphere smelled like that of a pot-house, the odours of stale spirits and of tobacco mingling unpleasantly. As my guide removed his hat and stood there, a square, gaunt figure in his queer, caped overcoat, I secured for the first time a view of his face in profile; and found it to be startlingly unfamiliar. Seen thus, my acquaintance was another man. I realized that there was something unnatural about the long, white hair, the grey face; that the sharp outline of brow, nose and chin was that of a much younger man than I had supposed him to be.

All this came to me in a momentary flash of perception, for immediately my attention was riveted upon a figure hunched up on a dilapidated sofa on the opposite side of the room. It was that of a big man, bearded and very heavily built, but whose face was scarred as by years of suffering, and whose eyes confirmed the story indicated by the smell of stale spirits with which the air of the room was laden. A nearly empty bottle stood on a table at his elbow, a glass beside it, and a pipe lay in a saucer full of ashes near the glass.

As we entered, the glazed eyes of the man opened widely and he clutched at the table with big red hands, leaning forward and staring horribly.

Saving this derelict figure and some few dirty utensils and scattered garments which indicated that the apartment was used both as a sleeping and living room, there was so little of interest in the place that automatically my wandering gaze strayed from the figure on the sofa to a large oil painting, unframed, which rested upon the mantelpiece above the dirty grate, in which the fire had become extinguished.

I uttered a stifled exclamation. It was "A Dream at Dawn"—evidently the original painting!

On the left of it, from a nail in the wall, hung a violin and bow, and on the right stood a sort of cylindrical glass case or closed jar upon a wooden base.

From the moment that I perceived the contents of this glass case a sense of fantasy claimed me, and I ceased to know where reality ended and mirage began.

It contained a tiny and perfect figure of a man. He was arrayed in a beautifully

fitting dress-suit such as a doll might have worn, and he was posed as if in the act of playing a violin, although no violin was present. At the elfin black hair and Mephistophelian face of this horrible, wonderful image, I stared fascinatedly.

I looked and looked at the dwarfed figure of . . . *Tchériapin!*

All these impressions came to me in the space of a few hectic moments, when in upon my mental tumult intruded a husky whisper from the man on the sofa.

"*Kreener!*" he said. "*Kreener!*"

At the sound of that name, and because of the way in which it was pronounced, I felt my blood running cold. The speaker was staring straight at my companion.

I clutched at the open door. I felt that there was still some crowning horror to come. I wanted to escape from that reeking room, but my muscles refused to obey me, and there I stood whilst:

"Kreener!" repeated the husky voice, and I saw that the speaker was rising unsteadily to his feet. "You have brought him again. Why have you brought him again? He will play. He will play me a step nearer to Hell!"

"Brace yourself, Colquhoun," said the voice of my companion. "Brace yourself."

"Take him awa'!" came in a sudden frenzied shriek. "Take him awa'! He's there at your elbow, Kreener, mockin' me, and pointing to that damned violin."

"Here!" said the stranger, a high note of command in his voice. "Drop that! Sit down at once."

Even as the other obeyed him, the cloaked stranger, stepping to the mantelpiece, opened a small box which lay there beside the glass case. He turned to me; and I tried to shrink away from him. For I knew—I knew—yet I loathed to look upon—what was in the box. Muffled as though reaching me through fog, I heard the words:

"A perfect human body . . . in miniature . . . every organ intact by means of . . . process . . . rendered indestructible. Tchériapin as he was in life may be seen by the curious, ten thousand years hence. Incomplete . . . one respect . . . here in this box . . ."

The spell was broken by a horrifying shriek from the man whom my companion had addressed as Colquhoun, and whom I could only suppose to be the painter of the celebrated picture which rested upon the mantelshelf.

"Take him awa', Kreener! He is reaching for the violin!"

Animation returned to me, and I fell rather than ran down the darkened stair. How I opened the street door I know not, but even as I stepped out into the squalid alleys of Pennyfields the cloaked figure was beside me. A hand was laid upon my shoulder.

"Listen!" commanded a deep voice.

Clearly, with an eerie sweetness, an evil, hellish beauty indescribable, the wailing of a Stradivarius violin crept to my ears from the room above. Slowly—slowly the music began, and my soul rose up in revolt.

"Listen!" repeated the voice. "Listen! It is 'The Black Mass'!"

W. W. Jacobs

THE MONKEY'S PAW

from THE LADY OF THE BARGE

Dodd, Mead and Company

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1

Without, the night was cold and wet, but in the small parlour of Laburnum Villa the blinds were drawn and the fire burned brightly. Father and son were at chess; the former, who possessed ideas about the game involving radical changes, putting his king into such sharp and unnecessary perils that it even provoked comment from the white-haired old lady knitting placidly by the fire.

"Hark at the wind," said Mr. White, who, having seen a fatal mistake after it was too late, was amiably desirous of preventing his son from seeing it.

"I'm listening," said the latter, grimly surveying the board as he stretched out his hand. "Check."

"I should hardly think that he'd come to-night," said his father, with his hand poised over the board.

"Mate," replied the son.

"That's the worst of living so far out," bawled Mr. White, with sudden and unlooked-for violence; "of all the beastly, slushy, out-of-the-way places to live in, this is the worst. Path's a bog, and the road's a torrent. I don't know what people are thinking about. I suppose because only two houses in the road are let, they think it doesn't matter."

"Never mind, dear," said his wife soothingly; "perhaps you'll win the next one."

Mr. White looked up sharply, just in time to intercept a knowing glance between mother and son. The words died away on his lips, and he hid a guilty grin in his thin grey beard.

"There he is," said Herbert White, as the gate banged to loudly and heavy footsteps came towards the door.

The old man rose with hospitable haste, and opening the door, was heard condoling with the new arrival. The new arrival also condoled with himself, so that Mrs. White said, "Tut, tut!" and coughed gently as her husband entered the room, followed by a tall, burly man, beady of eye and rubicund of visage.

"Sergeant-Major Morris," he said, introducing him.

The sergeant-major shook hands, and taking the proffered seat by the fire,

watched contentedly while his host got out whisky and tumblers and stood a small copper kettle on the fire.

At the third glass his eyes got brighter, and he began to talk, the little family circle regarding with eager interest this visitor from distant parts, as he squared his broad shoulders in the chair, and spoke of wild scenes and doughty deeds; of wars and plagues, and strange peoples.

"Twenty-one years of it," said Mr. White, nodding at his wife and son. "When he went away he was a slip of a youth in the warehouse. Now look at him."

"He don't look to have taken much harm," said Mrs. White politely.

"I'd like to go to India myself," said the old man, "just to look round a bit, you know."

"Better where you are," said the sergeant-major, shaking his head. He put down the empty glass, and sighing softly, shook it again.

"I should like to see those old temples and fakirs and jugglers," said the old man. "What was that you started telling me the other day about a monkey's paw or something, Morris?"

"Nothing," said the soldier hastily. "Leastways nothing worth hearing."

"Monkey's paw?" said Mrs. White curiously.

"Well, it's just a bit of what you might call magic, perhaps," said the sergeant-major off-handedly.

His three listeners leaned forward eagerly. The visitor absent-mindedly put his empty glass to his lips and then set it down again. His host filled it for him.

"To look at," said the sergeant-major, fumbling in his pocket, "it's just an ordinary little paw, dried to a mummy."

He took something out of his pocket and proffered it. Mrs. White drew back with a grimace, but her son, taking it, examined it curiously.

"And what is there special about it?" enquired Mr. White as he took it from his son, and having examined it, placed it upon the table.

"It had a spell put on it by an old fakir," said the sergeant-major, "a very holy man. He wanted to show that fate ruled people's lives, and that those who interfered with it did so to their sorrow. He put a spell on it so that three separate men could each have three wishes from it."

His manner was so impressive that his hearers were conscious that their light laughter jarred somewhat.

"Well, why don't you have three, sir?" said Herbert White cleverly.

The soldier regarded him in the way that middle age is wont to regard presumptuous youth. "I have," he said quietly, and his blotchy face whitened.

"And did you really have the three wishes granted?" asked Mrs. White.

"I did," said the sergeant-major, and his glass tapped against his strong teeth.

"And has anybody else wished?" persisted the old lady.

"The first man had his three wishes. Yes," was the reply; "I don't know what the first two were, but the third was for death. That's how I got the paw."

His tones were so grave that a hush fell upon the group.

"If you've had your three wishes, it's no good to you now then, Morris," said the old man at last. "What do you keep it for?"

The soldier shook his head. "Fancy, I suppose," he said slowly. "I did have some idea of selling it, but I don't think I will. It has caused enough mischief already. Besides, people won't buy. They think it's a fairy tale, some of them; and those who do think anything of it want to try it first and pay me afterward."

"If you could have another three wishes," said the old man, eyeing him keenly, "would you have them?"

"I don't know," said the other. "I don't know."

He took the paw, and dangling it between his forefinger and thumb, suddenly threw it upon the fire. White, with a slight cry, stooped down and snatched it off.

"Better let it burn," said the soldier solemnly.

"If you don't want it, Morris," said the other, "give it to me."

"I won't," said his friend doggedly. "I threw it on the fire. If you keep it, don't blame me for what happens. Pitch it on the fire again like a sensible man."

The other shook his head and examined his new possession closely. "How do you do it?" he enquired.

"Hold it up in your right hand and wish aloud," said the sergeant-major, "but I warn you of the consequences."

"Sounds like the *Arabian Nights*," said Mrs. White, as she rose and began to set the supper. "Don't you think you might wish for four pairs of hands for me?"

Her husband drew the talisman from his pocket, and then all three burst into laughter as the sergeant-major, with a look of alarm on his face, caught him by the arm.

"If you must wish," he said gruffly, "wish for something sensible."

Mr. White dropped it back in his pocket, and placing chairs, motioned his friend to the table. In the business of supper the talisman was partly forgotten, and afterwards the three sat listening in an enthralled fashion to a second instalment of the soldier's adventures in India.

"If the tale about the monkey's paw is not more truthful than those he has been telling us," said Herbert, as the door closed behind their guest, just in time to catch the last train, "we shan't make much out of it."

"Did you give him anything for it, father?" enquired Mrs. White, regarding her husband closely.

"A trifle," said he, colouring slightly. "He didn't want it, but I made him take it. And he pressed me again to throw it away."

"Likely," said Herbert, with pretended horror. "Why, we're going to be rich, and famous, and happy. Wish to be an emperor, father, to begin with; then you can't be henpecked."

He darted round the table, pursued by the maligned Mrs. White armed with an antimacassar.

Mr. White took the paw from his pocket and eyed it dubiously. "I don't know what to wish for, and that's a fact," he said slowly. "It seems to me I've got all I want."

"If you only cleared the house, you'd be quite happy, wouldn't you!" said

Herbert, with his hand on his shoulder. "Well, wish for two hundred pounds, then; that'll just do it."

His father, smiling shamefacedly at his own credulity, held up the talisman, as his son, with a solemn face, somewhat marred by a wink at his mother, sat down at the piano and struck a few impressive chords.

"I wish for two hundred pounds," said the old man distinctly.

A fine crash from the piano greeted the words, interrupted by a shuddering cry from the old man. His wife and son ran toward him.

"It moved," he cried, with a glance of disgust at the object as it lay on the floor. "As I wished, it twisted in my hand like a snake."

"Well, I don't see the money," said his son, as he picked it up and placed it on the table, "and I bet I never shall."

"It must have been your fancy, father," said his wife, regarding him anxiously.

He shook his head. "Never mind, though; there's no harm done, but it gave me a shock all the same."

They sat down by the fire again while the two men finished their pipes. Outside, the wind was higher than ever, and the old man started nervously at the sound of a door banging upstairs. A silence unusual and depressing settled upon all three, which lasted until the old couple arose to retire for the night.

"I expect you'll find the cash tied up in a big bag in the middle of your bed," said Herbert, as he bade them good night, "and something horrible squatting up on top of the wardrobe watching you as you pocket your ill-gotten gains."

He sat alone in the darkness, gazing at the dying fire, and seeing faces in it. The last face was so horrible and so simian that he gazed at it in amazement. It got so vivid that, with a little uneasy laugh, he felt on the table for a glass containing a little water to throw over it. His hand grasped the monkey's paw, and with a little shiver he wiped his hand on his coat and went up to bed.

2

In the brightness of the wintry sun next morning as it streamed over the breakfast table he laughed at his fears. There was an air of prosaic wholesomeness about the room which it had lacked on the previous night, and the dirty, shrivelled little paw was pitched on the side-board with a carelessness which betokened no great belief in its virtues.

"I suppose all old soldiers are the same," said Mrs. White. "The idea of our listening to such nonsense! How could wishes be granted in these days? And if they could, how could two hundred pounds hurt you, father?"

"Might drop on his head from the sky," said the frivolous Herbert.

"Morris said the things happened so naturally," said his father, "that you might if you so wished attribute it to coincidence."

"Well, don't break into the money before I come back," said Herbert as he rose from the table. "I'm afraid it'll turn you into a mean, avaricious man, and we shall have to disown you."

His mother laughed, and following him to the door, watched him down the

road; and returning to the breakfast table, was very happy at the expense of her husband's credulity. All of which did not prevent her from scurrying to the door at the postman's knock, nor prevent her from referring somewhat shortly to retired sergeant-majors of bibulous habits when she found that the post brought a tailor's bill.

"Herbert will have some more of his funny remarks, I expect, when he comes home," she said, as they sat at dinner.

"I dare say," said Mr. White, pouring himself out some beer; "but for all that, the thing moved in my hand; that I'll swear to."

"You thought it did," said the old lady soothingly.

"I say it did," replied the other. "There was no thought about it; I had just—— What's the matter?"

His wife made no reply. She was watching the mysterious movements of a man outside, who, peering in an undecided fashion at the house, appeared to be trying to make up his mind to enter. In mental connection with the two hundred pounds, she noticed that the stranger was well dressed, and wore a silk hat of glossy newness. Three times he paused at the gate, and then walked on again. The fourth time he stood with his hand upon it, and then with sudden resolution flung it open and walked up the path. Mrs. White at the same moment placed her hands behind her, and hurriedly unfastening the strings of her apron, put that useful article of apparel beneath the cushion of her chair.

She brought the stranger, who seemed ill at ease, into the room. He gazed at her furtively, and listened in a preoccupied fashion as the old lady apologized for the appearance of the room, and her husband's coat, a garment which he usually reserved for the garden. She then waited as patiently as her sex would permit, for him to broach his business, but he was at first strangely silent.

"I—was asked to call," he said at last, and stooped and picked a piece of cotton from his trousers. "I come from 'Maw and Meggins.'"

The old lady started. "Is anything the matter?" she asked breathlessly. "Has anything happened to Herbert? What is it? What is it?"

Her husband interposed. "There, there, mother," he said hastily. "Sit down, and don't jump to conclusions. You've not brought bad news, I'm sure, sir"; and he eyed the other wistfully.

"I'm sorry——" began the visitor.

"Is he hurt?" demanded the mother wildly.

The visitor bowed in assent. "Badly hurt," he said quietly, "but he is not in any pain."

"Oh, thank God!" said the old woman, clasping her hands. "Thank God for that! Thank——"

She broke off suddenly as the sinister meaning of the assurance dawned upon her, and she saw the awful confirmation of her fears in the other's averted face. She caught her breath, and turning to her slower-witted husband, laid a trembling old hand upon his. There was a long silence.

"He was caught in the machinery," said the visitor at length in a low voice.

"Caught in the machinery," repeated Mr. White, in a dazed fashion, "yes."

He sat staring blankly out at the window, and taking his wife's hand between his own, pressed it as he had been wont to do in their old courting days nearly forty years before.

"He was the only one left to us," he said, turning gently to the visitor. "It is hard."

The other coughed, and rising, walked slowly to the window. "The firm wished me to convey their sincere sympathy with you in your great loss," he said, without looking round. "I beg that you will understand I am only their servant and merely obeying orders."

There was no reply; the old woman's face was white, her eyes staring, and her breath inaudible; on the husband's face was a look such as his friend the sergeant might have carried into his first action.

"I was to say that Maw and Meggins disclaim all responsibility," continued the other. "They admit no liability at all, but in consideration of your son's services, they wish to present you with a certain sum as compensation."

Mr. White dropped his wife's hand, and rising to his feet, gazed with a look of horror at his visitor. His dry lips shaped the words, "How much?"

"Two hundred pounds," was the answer.

Unconscious of his wife's shriek, the old man smiled faintly, put out his hands like a sightless man, and dropped, a senseless heap, to the floor.

3

In the huge new cemetery, some two miles distant, the old people buried their dead, and came back to the house steeped in shadow and silence. It was all over so quickly that at first they could hardly realise it, and remained in a state of expectation as though of something else to happen—something else which was to lighten this load, too heavy for old hearts to bear.

But the days passed, and expectation gave place to resignation—the hopeless resignation of the old, sometimes miscalled apathy. Sometimes they hardly exchanged a word, for now they had nothing to talk about, and their days were long to weariness.

It was about a week after, that the old man, waking suddenly in the night, stretched out his hand and found himself alone. The room was in darkness, and the sound of subdued weeping came from the window. He raised himself in bed and listened.

"Come back," he said tenderly. "You will be cold."

"It is colder for my son," said the old woman, and wept afresh.

The sound of her sobs died away on his ears. The bed was warm, and his eyes heavy with sleep. He dozed fitfully, and then slept until a sudden wild cry from his wife awoke him with a start.

"*The paw!*" she cried wildly. "The monkey's paw!"

He started up in alarm. "Where? Where is it? What's the matter?"

She came stumbling across the room toward him. "I want it," she said quietly. "You've not destroyed it?"

"It's in the parlour, on the bracket," he replied, marvelling. "Why?"

She cried and laughed together, and bending over, kissed his cheek.

"I only just thought of it," she said hysterically. "Why didn't I think of it before? Why didn't *you* think of it?"

"Think of what?" he questioned.

"The other two wishes," she replied rapidly. "We've only had one."

"Was not that enough?" he demanded fiercely.

"No," she cried triumphantly; "we'll have one more. Go down and get it quickly, and wish our boy alive again."

The man sat up in bed and flung the bedclothes from his quaking limbs. "Good God, you are mad!" he cried, aghast.

"Get it," she panted; "get it quickly, and wish— Oh, my boy, my boy!"

Her husband struck a match and lit the candle. "Get back to bed," he said unsteadily. "You don't know what you are saying."

"We had the first wish granted," said the old woman feverishly; "Why not the second?"

"A coincidence," stammered the old man.

"Go and get it and wish," cried his wife, quivering with excitement.

The old man turned and regarded her, and his voice shook. "He has been dead ten days, and besides he—I would not tell you else, but—I could only recognize him by his clothing. If he was too terrible for you to see then, how now?"

"Bring him back," cried the old woman, and dragged him toward the door. "Do you think I fear the child I have nursed?"

He went down in the darkness, and felt his way to the parlour, and then to the mantelpiece. The talisman was in its place, and a horrible fear that the unspoken wish might bring his mutilated son before him ere he could escape from the room seized upon him, and he caught his breath as he found that he had lost the direction of the door. His brow cold with sweat, he felt his way round the table, and groped along the wall until he found himself in the small passage with the unwholesome thing in his hand.

Even his wife's face seemed changed as he entered the room. It was white and expectant, and to his fears seemed to have an unnatural look upon it. He was afraid of her.

"*Wish!*" she cried, in a strong voice.

"It is foolish and wicked," he faltered.

"*Wish!*" repeated his wife.

He raised his hand. "I wish my son alive again."

The talisman fell to the floor, and he regarded it fearfully. Then he sank trembling into a chair as the old woman, with burning eyes, walked to the window and raised the blind.

He sat until he was chilled with the cold, glancing occasionally at the figure of the old woman peering through the window. The candle-end, which had burned below the rim of the china candle-stick, was throwing pulsating shadows on the ceiling and walls, until, with a flicker larger than the rest it expired. The

old man, with an unspeakable sense of relief at the failure of the talisman, crept back to his bed, and a minute or two afterward the old woman came silently and apathetically beside him.

Neither spoke, but lay silently listening to the ticking of the clock. A stair creaked, and a squeaky mouse scurried noisily through the wall. The darkness was oppressive, and after lying for some time screwing up his courage, he took the box of matches, and striking one, went downstairs for a candle.

At the foot of the stairs the match went out, and he paused to strike another; and at the same moment a knock, so quiet and stealthy as to be scarcely audible, sounded on the front door.

The matches fell from his hand and spilled in the passage. He stood motionless, his breath suspended until the knock was repeated. Then he turned and fled swiftly back to his room, and closed the door behind him. A third knock sounded through the house.

"*What's that?*" cried the old woman, starting up.

"A rat," said the old man in shaking tones—"a rat. It passed me on the stairs."

His wife sat up in bed listening. A loud knock resounded through the house.

"It's Herbert!" she screamed. "It's Herbert!"

She ran to the door, but her husband was before her, and catching her by the arm, held her tightly.

"What are you going to do?" he whispered hoarsely.

"It's my boy; it's Herbert!" she cried, struggling mechanically. "I forgot it was two miles away. What are you holding me for? Let go. I must open the door."

"For God's sake don't let it in," cried the old man, trembling.

"You're afraid of your own son," she cried, struggling. "Let me go. I'm coming, Herbert; I'm coming."

There was another knock, and another. The old woman with a sudden wrench broke free and ran from the room. Her husband followed to the landing, and called after her appealingly as she hurried downstairs. He heard the chain rattle back and the bottom bolt drawn slowly and stiffly from the socket. Then the old woman's voice, strained and panting.

"The bolt," she cried loudly. "Come down. I can't reach it."

But her husband was on his hands and knees groping wildly on the floor in search of the paw. If he could only find it before the thing outside got in. A perfect fusillade of knocks reverberated through the house, and he heard the scraping of a chair as his wife put it down in the passage against the door. He heard the creaking of the bolt as it came slowly back, and at the same moment he found the monkey's paw, and frantically breathed his third and last wish.

The knocking ceased suddenly, although the echoes of it were still in the house. He heard the chair drawn back, and the door opened. A cold wind rushed up the staircase, and a long loud wail of disappointment and misery from his wife gave him courage to run down to her side, and then to the gate beyond. The street lamp flickering opposite shone on a quiet and deserted road.

A. J. Alan

THE HAIR

from GOOD EVENING, EVERYONE!

Hutchinson, 1928

Permission to reprint is granted by the author and Charles Lavell

Mr. Alan's stories are told over the microphone, and taken down verbatim in shorthand. They provide an interesting example of the modern revival of storytelling (as opposed to story-writing) under the influence of the Wireless Broadcast.

I'm going to give you an account of certain occurrences. I shan't attempt to explain them because they're quite beyond me. When you've heard all the facts, some of you may be able to offer suggestions. You must forgive me for going into a certain amount of detail. When you don't understand what you're talking about it's so difficult to know what to leave out.

This business began in the dark ages, before there was any broadcasting. In fact, in 1921.

I'd been staying the week-end with a friend of mine who lives about fifteen miles out of Bristol.

There was another man stopping there, too, who lived at Dawlish. Well, on the Monday morning our host drove us into Bristol in time for the Dawlish man to catch his train, which left a good deal earlier than the London one. Of course, if old Einstein had done his job properly, we could both have gone by the same train. As it was, I had over half an hour to wait. Talking of Einstein, wouldn't it be almost worth while dying young so as to hear what Euclid says to him when they meet—wherever it is?

There was a funny little old sort of curiosity shop in one of the streets I went down, and I stopped to look in the window. Right at the back, on a shelf, was a round brass box, not unlike a powder-box in shape, and it rather took my fancy. I don't know why—perhaps it was because I'd never seen anything quite like it before. That must be why some women buy some hats.

Anyway, the shop window was so dirty that you could hardly see through it, so I went inside to have a closer look. An incredibly old man came out of the back regions and told me all he knew about the box, which wasn't very much. It was fairly heavy, made of brass, round, four inches high, and about three inches in diameter. There was something inside it, which we could hear when we shook it, but no one had ever been able to get the lid off. He'd bought it from a sailor some years before, but couldn't say in the least what part of the world it came from.

"What about fifteen bob?"

I offered him ten, and he took it very quickly, and then I had to sprint back to the station to catch my train. When I got home I took the box up into my workshop and had a proper look at it. It was extremely primitive as regards work, and had evidently been made by hand, and not on a lathe. Also, there had been something engraved on the lid, but it had been taken off with a file. Next job was to get the lid off without doing any damage to it. It was a good deal more than hand tight, and no ordinary methods were any good. I stood it lid downwards for a week in a dish of glycerine as a start, and then made two brass collars, one for the box and one for the lid. At the end of the week I bolted the collars on, fixed the box in the vice and tried tapping the lid round with a hammer—but it wouldn't start. Then, I tried it the other way and it went at once. That explained why no one had ever been able to unscrew it—it had a left-handed thread on it. Rather a dirty trick—especially to go and do it all those years before.

Well, here it was, unscrewing very sweetly, and I began to feel quite like Howard Carter, wondering what I was going to find. It might go off bang, or jump out and hit me in the face. However, nothing exciting happened when the lid came off. In fact, the box only seemed to be half-full of dust, but at the bottom was a curled-up plait of hair. When straightened out, it was about nine inches long and nearly as thick as a pencil. I unplaited a short length and found it consisted of some hundreds of very fine hairs, but in such a filthy state (I shoved them under the microscope) that there was nothing much to be seen. So I thought I'd clean them. You may as well know the process—first of all a bath of dilute hydrochloric acid to get the grease off, then a solution of washing soda to remove the acid. Then a washing in distilled water, then a bath of alcohol to get rid of any traces of water, and a final rinsing in ether to top off with.

Just as I took it out of the ether they called me down to the telephone, so I shoved it down on the first clean thing which came handy, namely, a piece of white cardboard, and went downstairs. When I examined the plait later on, the only thing of interest that came to light was the fact that the hairs had all apparently belonged to several different women. The colours ranged from jet-black, through brown, red, and gold, right up to pure white. None of the hair was dyed, which proved how very old it was. I showed it to one or two people, but they didn't seem very enthusiastic, so I put it, and its box, in a little corner cupboard we have, and forgot all about it.

Then the first strange coincidence happened.

About ten days later a pal of mine called Matthews came into the club with a bandage across his forehead. People naturally asked him what was the matter, and he said he didn't know, and what's more his doctor didn't know. He'd suddenly flopped down on his drawing-room floor, in the middle of tea, and lain like a log. His wife was in a fearful stew, of course, and telephoned for the doctor. However, Matthews came round at the end of about five minutes, and sat up and asked what had hit him. When the doctor blew in a few minutes later he was pretty well all right again except for a good deal of pain in his fore-

head. The doctor couldn't find anything the matter except a red mark which was beginning to show on the skin just where the pain was.

Well, this mark got clearer and clearer, until it looked just like a blow from a stick. Next day it was about the same, except that a big bruise had come up all round the mark. After that it got gradually better. Matthews took the bandage off and showed it me at the club, and there was nothing much more than a bruise with a curved red line down the middle of it, like the track of a red-hot worm.

They'd decided that he'd had an attack of giddiness and must somehow have bumped his head in falling. And that was that.

About a month later, my wife said to me: "We really must tidy your workshop!" And I said: "Must we?" And she said: "Yes, it's a disgrace." So up we went.

Tidying my workshop consists of putting the tools back in their racks, and of my wife wanting to throw away things she finds on the floor, and me saying: "Oh, no, I could use that for so and so."

The first thing we came across was the piece of white cardboard I'd used to put the plait of hair on while I'd run down to the telephone that day.

When we came to look at the other side we found it was a flashlight photograph of a dinner I'd been at. You know what happens. Just before the speeches a lot of blighters come in with a camera and some poles with tin trays on the top, and someone says: "Will the chairman please stand?" and he's helped to his feet. Then there's a blinding flash and the room's full of smoke, and the blighters go out again. Later on a man comes round with proofs, and if you are very weak—or near the chairman—you order one print.

Well, this dinner had been the worshipful company of skate-fasteners or something, and I'd gone as the guest of the same bloke Matthews I've already been telling you about, and we'd sat "side by each," as the saying is. My wife was looking at the photograph, and she said: "What's that mark on Mr. Matthews's forehead?" And I looked—and there, sure enough, was the exact mark that he'd come into the club with a month before. The curious part being, of course, that the photograph had been taken at least six months before he'd had the funny attack which caused the mark. Now, then—on the back of the photograph, when we examined it, was a faint brown line. This was evidently left by the plait of hair when I'd pinned it out to dry, and it had soaked through and caused the mark on Matthews's face. I checked it by shoving a needle right through the cardboard. Of course, this looked like a very strange coincidence, on the face of it. I don't know what your experience of coincidences is—but mine is that they usually aren't. Anyway, I took the trouble to trace out the times, and I finally established, beyond a shadow of a doubt, that I had pinned the hair out on the photograph between four and a quarter-past on a particular day, and that Matthews had had his funny attack on the same day at about a quarter-past four. That was something *like* a coincidence. Next, the idea came to me to try it again. Not on poor old Matthews, obviously—he'd already had some—and, besides, he was a friend of mine. I know perfectly well that we are told to be kind

to our enemies, and so on—in fact I do quite a lot of that—but when it comes to trying an experiment of this kind—even if the chances are a million to one against it being a success, I mean having any result—one naturally chooses an enemy rather than a friend. So I looked round for a suitable—victim—someone who wouldn't be missed much, in case there happened to be another coincidence. The individual on whom my choice fell was the nurse next door.

We can see into their garden from our bathroom window—and we'd often noticed the rotten way she treated the child she had charge of when she thought no one was looking. Nothing one could definitely complain about—you know what a thankless job it is to butt into your neighbour's affairs—but she was systematically unkind, and we hated the sight of her. Another thing—when she first came she used to lean over the garden wall and sneak our roses—at least, she didn't even do that—she used to pull them off their stalks and let them drop—I soon stopped that. I fitted up some little arrangements of fish-hooks round some of the most accessible roses and anchored them to the ground with wires. There was Hell-and-Tommy the next morning, and she had her hand done up in bandages for a week.

Altogether she was just the person for my experiment. The first thing was to get a photograph of her, so the next sunny morning, when she was in the garden, I made a noise like an aeroplane out of the bathroom window to make her look up, and got her nicely. As soon as the first print was dry, about eleven o'clock the same night, I fastened the plait of hair across the forehead with two pins—feeling extremely foolish, as one would, of course, doing an idiotic thing like that—and put it away in a drawer in my workshop. The evening of the next day, when I got home, my wife met me and said: "What do you think—the nurse next door was found dead in bed this morning." And she went on to say that the people were quite upset about it, and there was going to be an inquest, and all the rest of it. I tell you, you could have knocked me down with a brick. I said: "No, not really; what did she die of?" You must understand that my lady wife didn't know anything about the experiment. She'd never have let me try it. She's rather superstitious—in spite of living with me. As soon as I could, I sneaked up to the workshop drawer and got out the photograph, and—I know you won't believe me, but it doesn't make any difference—when I unpinned the plait of hair and took it off there was a clearly-marked brown stain right across the nurse's forehead. I tell you, that *did* make me sit up, if you like—because that made twice—first Matthews and now—now.

It was rather disturbing, and I know it sounds silly, but I couldn't help feeling to blame in some vague way.

Well, the next thing was the inquest—I attended that, naturally, to know what the poor unfortunate woman had died of. Of course, they brought it in as "death from natural causes," namely, several burst blood-vessels in the brain; but what puzzled the doctors was what had caused the "natural causes"—also, she had the same sort of mark on her forehead as Matthews had had. They had gone very thoroughly into the theory that she might have been exposed to X-rays—it *did* look a bit like that—but it was more or less proved that she couldn't

have been, so they frankly gave it up. Of course, it was all very interesting and entertaining, and I quite enjoyed it, as far as one can enjoy an inquest, but they hadn't cleared up the vexed question—did she fall or was she pu—well, had she snuffed it on account of the plait of hair, or had she not? Obviously the matter couldn't be allowed to rest there—it was much too thrilling. So I looked about for someone else to try it on, and decided that a man who lived in the house opposite would do beautifully. He wasn't as bad as the nurse because he wasn't cruel—at least, not intentionally—he played the fiddle—so I decided not to kill him more than I could help.

The photograph was rather a bother because he didn't go out much. You've no idea how difficult it is to get a decent full-face photograph of a man who knows you by sight without him knowing. However, I managed to get one after a fortnight or so. It was rather small and I had to enlarge it, but it wasn't bad considering. He used to spend most of his evenings up in a top room practising, double stopping and what-not—so after dinner I went up to my workshop window, which overlooks his, and waited for him to begin. Then, when he'd really warmed up to his job, I just touched the plait across the photograph—not hard, but—well, like you do when you are testing a bit of twin flex to find out which wire is which, you touch the ends across an accumulator or an H.T. battery. Quite indefensible in theory, but invariably done in practice. (Personally, I always use the electric light mains—the required information is so instantly forthcoming.) Well, that's how I touched the photograph with the plait. The first time I did it my bloke played a wrong note. That was nothing, of course, so I did it again more slowly. This time there was no doubt about it. He hastily put down his fiddle and hung out of the window, gasping like a fish for about five minutes. I tell you, I was so surprised that I felt like doing the same.

However, I pulled myself together, and wondered whether one ought to burn the da—er—plait or not. But there seemed too many possibilities in it for that—so I decided to learn how to use it instead. It would take too long to tell you all about my experiments. They lasted for several months, and I reduced the thing to such an exact science that I could do anything from giving a gnat a headache to killing a man. All this, mind you, at the cost of one man, one woman, lots of wood-lice, and a conscientious objector. You must admit that that's pretty moderate, considering what fun one *could* have had with a discovery of that kind.

Well, it seemed to me that, now the control of my absent treatment had been brought to such a degree of accuracy, it would be rather a pity not to employ it in some practical way. In other words, to make a fortune quickly without undue loss of life.

One could, of course, work steadily through the people one disliked, but it wouldn't bring in anything for some time.

I mean, even if you insure them first you've got to wait a year before they die, or the company won't pay, and in any case it begins to look fishy after you've done it a few times. Then I had my great idea: Why shouldn't my process be applied to horse-racing? All one had to do was to pick some outsider in a race—

back it for all you were worth at about 100 to 1, and then see that it didn't get beaten.

The actual operation would be quite simple. One would only have to have a piece of cardboard with photographs of all the runners stuck on it—except the one that was to win, of course—and then take up a position giving a good view of the race.

I wasn't proposing to hurt any of the horses in the least. They were only going to get the lightest of touches, just enough to give them a tired feeling, soon after the start. Then, if my horse didn't seem to have the race well in hand near the finish, I could give one more light treatment to any horse which still looked dangerous.

It stood to reason that great care would have to be taken not to upset the running too much. For instance, if all the horses except one fell down, or even stopped and began to graze, there would be a chance of the race being declared void.

So I had two or three rehearsals. They worked perfectly. The last one hardly was a rehearsal because I had a tenner on at 33 to 1, just for luck—and, of course, it came off.

However, it wasn't as lucky as it sounds. Just outside the entrance to the grandstand there was rather a squash and, as I came away I got surrounded by four or five men who seemed to be pushing me about a bit, but it didn't strike me what the game was until one of them got his hand into the breast-pocket of my coat.

Then I naturally made a grab at him and got him just above the elbow with both hands, and drove his hand still further into my pocket. That naturally pushed the pocket, with his hand inside it, under my right arm, and I squeezed it against my ribs for all I was worth.

Now, there was nothing in that pocket but the test tube with the plait of hair in it, and the moment I started squeezing it went with a crunch. I'm a bit hazy about the next minute because my light-fingered friend tried to get free, and two of his pals helped him by bashing me over the head. They were quite rough. In fact, they entered so heartily into the spirit of the thing that they went on doing it until the police came up and collared them.

You should have seen that hand when it did come out of my pocket. Cut to pieces, and bits of broken glass sticking out all over it—like a crimson tipsy cake. He was so bad that we made a call at a doctor's on the way to the police station for him to have a small artery tied up. There was a cut on the back of my head that wanted a bit of attention, too. Quite a nice chap, the doctor, but he was my undoing. He was, without doubt, the baldest doctor I've ever seen, though I once saw a balder alderman.

When he'd painted me with iodine, I retrieved the rest of the broken glass and the hair from the bottom of my pocket and asked him if he could give me an empty bottle to put it in. He said: "Certainly," and produced one, and we corked the hair up in it. When I got home, eventually, I looked in the bottle, but apart from a little muddy substance at the bottom it was empty—the plait of

hair had melted away. Then I looked at the label on the bottle and found the name of a much-advertised hair restorer.

E. F. Benson

MRS. AMWORTH

from VISIBLE AND INVISIBLE

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The village of Maxley, where, last summer and autumn, these strange events took place, lies on a heathery and pine-clad upland of Sussex. In all England you could not find a sweeter and saner situation. Should the wind blow from the south, it comes laden with the spices of the sea; to the east high downs protect it from the inclemencies of March; and from the west and north the breezes which reach it travel over miles of aromatic forest and heather. The village itself is insignificant enough in point of population, but rich in amenities and beauty. Half-way down the single street, with its broad road and spacious areas of grass on each side, stands the little Norman Church and the antique graveyard long disused: for the rest there are a dozen small, sedate Georgian houses, red-bricked and long-windowed, each with a square of flower-garden in front, and an ampler strip behind; a score of shops, and a couple of score of thatched cottages belonging to labourers on neighbouring estates, complete the entire cluster of its peaceful habitations. The general peace, however, is sadly broken on Saturdays and Sundays, for we lie on one of the main roads between London and Brighton and our quiet street becomes a race-course for flying motor-cars and bicycles. A notice just outside the village begging them to go slowly only seems to encourage them to accelerate their speed, for the road lies open and straight, and there is really no reason why they should do otherwise. By way of protest, therefore, the ladies of Maxley cover their noses and mouths with their handkerchiefs as they see a motor-car approaching, though, as the street is asphalted, they need not really take these precautions against dust. But late on Sunday night the horde of scorchers has passed, and we settle down again to five days of cheerful and leisurely seclusion. Railway strikes which agitate the country so much leave us undisturbed because most of the inhabitants of Maxley never leave it at all.

I am the fortunate possessor of one of these small Georgian houses, and consider myself no less fortunate in having so interesting and stimulating a neighbour as Francis Urcombe, who, the most confirmed of Maxleyites, has not

slept away from his house, which stands just opposite to mine in the village street, for nearly two years, at which date, though still in middle life, he resigned his Physiological Professorship at Cambridge University, and devoted himself to the study of those occult and curious phenomena which seem equally to concern the physical and the psychical sides of human nature. Indeed his retirement was not unconnected with his passion for the strange uncharted places that lie on the confines and borders of science, the existence of which is so stoutly denied by the more materialistic minds, for he advocated that all medical students should be obliged to pass some sort of examination in mesmerism, and that one of the tripos papers should be designed to test their knowledge in such subjects as appearances at time of death, haunted houses, vampirism, automatic writing, and possession.

"Of course they wouldn't listen to me," ran his account of the matter, "for there is nothing that these seats of learning are so frightened of as knowledge, and the road to knowledge lies in the study of things like these. The functions of the human frame are, broadly speaking, known. They are a country, anyhow, that has been charted and mapped out. But outside that lie huge tracts of undiscovered country, which certainly exist, and the real pioneers of knowledge are those who, at the cost of being derided as credulous and superstitious, want to push on into those misty and probably perilous places. I felt that I could be of more use by setting out without compass or knapsack into the mists than by sitting in a cage like a canary and chirping about what was known. Besides, teaching is very very bad for a man who knows himself only to be a learner: you only need to be a self-conceited ass to teach."

Here, then, in Francis Urcombe, was a delightful neighbour to one who, like myself, has an uneasy and burning curiosity about what he called the "misty and perilous places"; and this last spring we had a further and most welcome addition to our pleasant little community, in the person of Mrs. Amworth, widow of an Indian civil servant. Her husband had been a judge in the North-West Provinces, and after his death at Peshawar she came back to England, and after a year in London found herself starving for the ampler air and sunshine of the country to take the place of the fogs and griminess of town. She had, too, a special reason for settling in Maxley, since her ancestors up till a hundred years ago had long been native to the place, and in the old churchyard, now disused, are many gravestones bearing her maiden name of Chaston. Big and energetic, her vigorous and genial personality speedily woke Maxley up to a higher degree of sociality than it had ever known. Most of us were bachelors or spinsters or elderly folk not much inclined to exert ourselves in the expense and effort of hospitality, and hitherto the gaiety of a small tea-party, with bridge afterwards and goloshes (when it was wet) to trip home in again for a solitary dinner, was about the climax of our festivities. But Mrs. Amworth showed us a more gregarious way, and set an example of luncheon-parties and little dinners, which we began to follow. On other nights when no such hospitality was on foot, a lone man like myself found it pleasant to know that a call on the telephone to Mrs. Amworth's house not a hundred yards off, and an enquiry as to

whether I might come over after dinner for a game of piquet before bed-time, would probably evoke a response of welcome. There she would be, with a comrade-like eagerness for companionship, and there was a glass of port and a cup of coffee and a cigarette and a game of piquet. She played the piano, too, in a free and exuberant manner, and had a charming voice and sang to her own accompaniment; and as the days grew long and the light lingered late, we played our game in her garden, which in the course of a few months she had turned from being a nursery for slugs and snails into a glowing patch of luxuriant blossomings. She was always cheery and jolly; she was interested in everything, and in music, in gardening, in games of all sorts was a competent performer. Everybody (with one exception) liked her, everybody felt her to bring with her the tonic of a sunny day. That one exception was Francis Urcombe; he, though he confessed he did not like her, acknowledged that he was vastly interested in her. This always seemed strange to me, for pleasant and jovial as she was, I could see nothing in her that could call forth conjecture or intrigued surmise, so healthy and unmysterious a figure did she present. But of the genuineness of Urcombe's interest there could be no doubt; one could see him watching and scrutinising her. In matter of age, she frankly volunteered the information that she was forty-five; but her briskness, her activity, her unravaged skin, her coal-black hair, made it difficult to believe that she was not adopting an unusual device, and adding ten years on to her age instead of subtracting them.

Often, also, as our quite unsentimental friendship ripened, Mrs. Amworth would ring me up and propose her advent. If I was busy writing, I was to give her, so we definitely bargained, a frank negative, and in answer I could hear her jolly laugh and her wishes for a successful evening of work. Sometimes, before her proposal arrived, Urcombe would already have stepped across from his house opposite for a smoke and a chat, and he, hearing who my intended visitor was, always urged me to beg her to come. She and I should play our piquet, said he, and he would look on, if we did not object, and learn something of the game. But I doubt whether he paid much attention to it, for nothing could be clearer than that, under that penthouse of forehead and thick eyebrows, his attention was fixed not on the cards, but on one of the players. But he seemed to enjoy an hour spent thus, and often, until one particular evening in July, he would watch her with the air of a man who has some deep problem in front of him. She, enthusiastically keen about our game, seemed not to notice his scrutiny. Then came that evening when, as I see in the light of subsequent events, began the first twitching of the veil that hid the secret horror from my eyes. I did not know it then, though I noticed that thereafter, if she rang up to propose coming round, she always asked not only if I was at leisure, but whether Mr. Urcombe was with me. If so, she said, she would not spoil the chat of two old bachelors, and laughingly wished me good night. Urcombe, on this occasion, had been with me for some half-hour before Mrs. Amworth's appearance, and had been talking to me about the mediæval beliefs concerning vampirism, one of those borderland subjects which he declared had not been sufficiently studied before it had been consigned by the medical profession to the dust-heap of exploded super-

stitions. There he sat, grim and eager, tracing with that pellucid clearness which had made him in his Cambridge days so admirable a lecturer, the history of those mysterious visitations. In them all there were the same general features: one of those ghoulish spirits took up its abode in a living man or woman, conferring supernatural powers of bat-like flight and glutting itself with nocturnal blood-feasts. When its host died it continued to dwell in the corpse, which remained undecayed. By day it rested, by night it left the grave and went on its awful errands. No European country in the Middle Ages seemed to have escaped them; earlier yet, parallels were to be found, in Roman and Greek and in Jewish history.

"It's a large order to set all that evidence aside as being moonshine," he said. "Hundreds of totally independent witnesses in many ages have testified to the occurrence of these phenomena, and there's no explanation known to me which covers all the facts. And if you feel inclined to say 'Why, then, if these are facts, do we not come across them now?' there are two answers I can make you. One is that there were diseases known in the Middle Ages, such as the black death, which were certainly existent then and which have become extinct since, but for that reason we do not assert that such diseases never existed. Just as the black death visited England and decimated the population of Norfolk, so here in this very district about three hundred years ago there was certainly an outbreak of vampirism, and Maxley was the centre of it. My second answer is even more convincing, for I tell you that vampirism is by no means extinct now. An outbreak of it certainly occurred in India a year or two ago."

At that moment I heard my knocker plied in the cheerful and peremptory manner in which Mrs. Amworth is accustomed to announce her arrival, and I went to the door to open it.

"Come in at once," I said, "and save me from having my blood curdled. Mr. Urcombe has been trying to alarm me."

Instantly her vital, voluminous presence seemed to fill the room.

"Ah, but how lovely!" she said. "I delight in having my blood curdled. Go on with your ghost-story, Mr. Urcombe. I adore ghost-stories."

I saw that, as his habit was, he was intently observing her.

"It wasn't a ghost-story exactly," said he. "I was only telling our host how vampirism was not extinct yet. I was saying that there was an outbreak of it in India only a few years ago."

There was a more than perceptible pause, and I saw that, if Urcombe was observing her, she on her side was observing him with fixed eye and parted mouth. Then her jolly laugh invaded that rather tense silence.

"Oh, what a shame!" she said. "You're not going to curdle my blood at all. Where did you pick up such a tale, Mr. Urcombe? I have lived for years in India and never heard a rumour of such a thing. Some story-teller in the bazaars must have invented it: they are famous at that."

I could see that Urcombe was on the point of saying something further, but checked himself.

"Ah! very likely that was it," he said.

But something had disturbed our usual peaceful sociability that night, and something had damped Mrs. Amworth's usual high spirits. She had no gusto for her piquet, and left after a couple of games. Urcombe had been silent too, indeed he hardly spoke again till she departed.

"That was unfortunate," he said, "for the outbreak of—of a very mysterious disease, let us call it, took place at Peshawar where she and her husband were. And—"

"Well?" I asked.

"He was one of the victims of it," said he. "Naturally I had quite forgotten that when I spoke."

The summer was unreasonably hot and rainless, and Maxley suffered much from drought, and also from a plague of big black night-flying gnats, the bite of which was very irritating and virulent. They came sailing in of an evening, settling on one's skin so quietly that one perceived nothing till the sharp stab announced that one had been bitten. They did not bite the hands or face, but chose always the neck and throat for their feeding-ground, and most of us, as the poison spread, assumed a temporary goitre. Then about the middle of August appeared the first of those mysterious cases of illness which our local doctor attributed to the long-continued heat coupled with the bite of these venomous insects. The patient was a boy of sixteen or seventeen, the son of Mrs. Amworth's gardener, and the symptoms were an anæmic pallor and a languid prostration, accompanied by great drowsiness and an abnormal appetite. He had, too, on his throat two small punctures where, so Dr. Ross conjectured, one of these great gnats had bitten him. But the odd thing was that there was no swelling or inflammation round the place where he had been bitten. The heat at this time had begun to abate, but the cooler weather failed to restore him, and the boy, in spite of the quantity of good food which he so ravenously swallowed, wasted away to a skin-clad skeleton.

I met Dr. Ross in the street one afternoon about this time, and in answer to my enquiries about his patient he said that he was afraid the boy was dying. The case, he confessed, completely puzzled him: some obscure form of pernicious anæmia was all he could suggest. But he wondered whether Mr. Urcombe would consent to see the boy, on the chance of his being able to throw some new light on the case, and since Urcombe was dining with me that night, I proposed to Dr. Ross to join us. He could not do this, but said he would look in later. When he came, Urcombe at once consented to put his skill at the other's disposal, and together they went off at once. Being thus shorn of my sociable evening, I telephoned to Mrs. Amworth to know if I might inflict myself on her for an hour. Her answer was a welcoming affirmative, and between piquet and music the hour lengthened itself into two. She spoke of the boy who was lying so desperately and mysteriously ill, and told me that she had often been to see him, taking him nourishing and delicate food. But to-day—and her kind eyes moistened as she spoke—she was afraid she had paid her last visit. Knowing the antipathy between her and Urcombe, I did not tell her that he had been called into consultation; and when I returned home she accompanied me to my door,

for the sake of a breath of night air, and in order to borrow a magazine which contained an article on gardening which she wished to read.

"Ah, this delicious night air," she said, luxuriously sniffing in the coolness. "Night air and gardening are the great tonics. There is nothing so stimulating as bare contact with rich mother earth. You are never so fresh as when you have been grubbing in the soil—black hands, black nails, and boots covered with mud." She gave her great jovial laugh.

"I'm a glutton for air and earth," she said. "Positively I look forward to death, for then I shall be buried and have the kind earth all round me. No leaden caskets for me—I have given explicit directions. But what shall I do about air? Well, I suppose one can't have everything. The magazine? A thousand thanks, I will faithfully return it. Good night: garden and keep your windows open, and you won't have anæmia."

"I always sleep with my windows open," said I.

I went straight up to my bedroom, of which one of the windows looks out over the street, and as I undressed I thought I heard voices talking outside not far away. But I paid no particular attention, put out my lights, and falling asleep plunged into the depths of a most horrible dream, distortedly suggested, no doubt, by my last words with Mrs. Amworth. I dreamed that I woke, and found that both my bedroom windows were shut. Half-suffocating I dreamed that I sprang out of bed, and went across to open them. The blind over the first one was drawn down, and pulling it up I saw, with the indescribable horror of incipient nightmare, Mrs. Amworth's face suspended close to the pane in the darkness outside, nodding and smiling at me. Pulling down the blind again to keep that terror out, I rushed to the second window on the other side of the room, and there again was Mrs. Amworth's face. Then the panic came upon me in full blast; here was I suffocating in the airless room, and whichever window I opened Mrs. Amworth's face would float in, like those noiseless black gnats that bit before one was aware. The nightmare rose to screaming point, and with strangled yells I awoke to find my room cool and quiet with both windows open and blinds up and a half-moon high in its course, casting an oblong of tranquil light on the floor. But even when I was awake the horror persisted, and I lay tossing and turning. I must have slept long before the nightmare seized me, for now it was nearly day, and soon in the east the drowsy eyelids of morning began to lift.

I was scarcely downstairs next morning—for after the dawn I slept late—when Urcombe rang up to know if he might see me immediately. He came in, grim and preoccupied, and I noticed that he was pulling on a pipe that was not even filled.

"I want your help," he said, "and so I must tell you first of all what happened last night. I went round with the little doctor to see his patient, and found him just alive, but scarcely more. I instantly diagnosed in my own mind what this anæmia, unaccountable by any other explanation, meant. The boy is the prey of a vampire."

He put his empty pipe on the breakfast-table, by which I had just sat down,

and folded his arms, looking at me steadily from under his overhanging brows.

"Now about last night," he said. "I insisted that he should be moved from his father's cottage into my house. As we were carrying him on a stretcher, whom should we meet but Mrs. Amworth? She expressed shocked surprise that we were moving him. Now why do you think she did that?"

With a start of horror, as I remembered my dream that night before, I felt an idea come into my mind so preposterous and unthinkable that I instantly turned it out again.

"I haven't the smallest idea," I said.

"Then listen, while I tell you about what happened later. I put out all light in the room where the boy lay, and watched. One window was a little open, for I had forgotten to close it, and about midnight I heard something outside, trying apparently to push it farther open. I guessed who it was—yes, it was full twenty feet from the ground—and I peeped round the corner of the blind. Just outside was the face of Mrs. Amworth and her hand was on the frame of the window. Very softly I crept close, and then banged the window down, and I think I just caught the tip of one of her fingers."

"But it's impossible," I cried. "How could she be floating in the air like that? And what had she come for? Don't tell me such—"

Once more, with closer grip, the remembrance of my nightmare seized me.

"I am telling you what I saw," said he. "And all night long, until it was nearly day, she was fluttering outside, like some terrible bat, trying to gain admittance. Now put together various things I have told you."

He began checking them off on his fingers.

"Number one," he said: "there was an outbreak of disease similar to that which this boy is suffering from at Peshawar, and her husband died of it. Number two: Mrs. Amworth protested against my moving the boy to my house. Number three: she, or the demon that inhabits her body, a creature powerful and deadly, tries to gain admittance. And add this, too: in mediæval times there was an epidemic of vampirism here at Maxley. The vampire, so the accounts run, was found to be Elizabeth Chaston . . . I see you remember Mrs. Amworth's maiden name. Finally, the boy is stronger this morning. He would certainly not have been alive if he had been visited again. And what do you make of it?"

There was a long silence, during which I found this incredible horror assuming the hues of reality.

"I have something to add," I said, "which may or may not bear on it. You say that the—the spectre went away shortly before dawn."

"Yes."

I told him of my dream, and he smiled grimly.

"Yes, you did well to awake," he said. "That warning came from your subconscious self, which never wholly slumbers, and cried out to you of deadly danger. For two reasons, then, you must help me: one to save others, the second to save yourself."

"What do you want me to do?" I asked.

"I want you first of all to help me in watching this boy, and ensuring that she does not come near him. Eventually I want you to help me in tracking the thing down, in exposing and destroying it. It is not human: it is an incarnate fiend. What steps we shall have to take I don't yet know."

It was now eleven of the forenoon, and presently I went across to his house for a twelve-hour vigil while he slept, to come on duty again that night, so that for the next twenty-four hours either Urcombe or myself was always in the room where the boy, now getting stronger every hour, was lying. The day following was Saturday and a morning of brilliant, pellucid weather, and already when I went across to his house to resume my duty the stream of motors down to Brighton had begun. Simultaneously I saw Urcombe with a cheerful face, which boded good news of his patient, coming out of his house, and Mrs. Amworth, with a gesture of salutation to me and a basket in her hand, walking up the broad strip of grass which bordered the road. There we all three met. I noticed (and saw that Urcombe noticed it too) that one finger of her left hand was bandaged.

"Good morning to you both," said she. "And I hear your patient is doing well, Mr. Urcombe. I have come to bring him a bowl of jelly, and to sit with him for an hour. He and I are great friends. I am overjoyed at his recovery."

Urcombe paused a moment, as if making up his mind, and then shot out a pointing finger at her.

"I forbid that," he said. "You shall not sit with him or see him. And you know the reason as well as I do."

I have never seen so horrible a change pass over a human face as that which now blanched hers to the colour of a grey mist. She put up her hand as if to shield herself from that pointing finger, which drew the sign of the cross in the air, and shrank back cowering on to the road. There was a wild hoot from a horn, a grinding of brakes, a shout—too late—from a passing car, and one long scream suddenly cut short. Her body rebounded from the roadway after the first wheel had gone over it, and the second followed it. It lay there, quivering and twitching, and was still.

She was buried three days afterwards in the cemetery outside Maxley, in accordance with the wishes she had told me that she had devised about her interment, and the shock which her sudden and awful death had caused to the little community began by degrees to pass off. To two people only, Urcombe and myself, the horror of it was mitigated from the first by the nature of the relief that her death brought; but, naturally enough, we kept our own counsel, and no hint of what greater horror had been thus averted was ever let slip. But, oddly enough, so it seemed to me, he was still not satisfied about something in connection with her, and would give no answer to my questions on the subject. Then as the days of a tranquil mellow September and the October that followed began to drop away like the leaves of the yellowing trees, his uneasiness relaxed. But before the entry of November the seeming tranquillity broke into hurricane.

I had been dining one night at the far end of the village, and about eleven

o'clock was walking home again. The moon was of an unusual brilliance, rendering all that it shone on as distinct as in some etching. I had just come opposite the house which Mrs. Amworth had occupied, where there was a board up telling that it was to let, when I heard the click of her front gate, and next moment I saw, with a sudden chill and quaking of my very spirit, that she stood there. Her profile, vividly illuminated, was turned to me, and I could not be mistaken in my identification of her. She appeared not to see me (indeed the shadow of the yew hedge in front of her garden enveloped me in its blackness) and she went swiftly across the road, and entered the gate of the house directly opposite. There I lost sight of her completely.

My breath was coming in short pants as if I had been running—and now indeed I ran, with fearful backward glances, along the hundred yards that separated me from my house and Urcombe's. It was to his that my flying steps took me, and next minute I was within.

"What have you come to tell me?" he asked. "Or shall I guess?"

"You can't guess," said I.

"No; it's no guess. She has come back and you have seen her. Tell me about it."

I gave him my story.

"That's Major Pearsall's house," he said. "Come back with me there at once."

"But what can we do?" I asked.

"I've no idea. That's what we have got to find out."

A minute later, we were opposite the house. When I had passed it before, it was all dark; now lights gleamed from a couple of windows upstairs. Even as we faced it, the front door opened, and next moment Major Pearsall emerged from the gate. He saw us and stopped.

"I'm on my way to Dr. Ross," he said quickly. "My wife has been taken suddenly ill. She had been in bed an hour when I came upstairs, and I found her white as a ghost and utterly exhausted. She had been to sleep, it seemed— But you will excuse me."

"One moment, Major," said Urcombe. "Was there any mark on her throat?"

"How did you guess that?" said he. "There was: one of those beastly gnats must have bitten her twice there. She was streaming with blood."

"And there's someone with her?" asked Urcombe.

"Yes, I roused her maid."

He went off, and Urcombe turned to me. "I know now what we have to do," he said. "Change your clothes, and I'll join you at your house."

"What is it?" I asked.

"I'll tell you on our way. We're going to the cemetery."

He carried a pick, a shovel, and a screwdriver when he rejoined me, and wore round his shoulders a long coil of rope. As we walked, he gave me the outlines of the ghastly hour that lay before us.

"What I have to tell you," he said, "will seem to you now too fantastic for credence, but before dawn we shall see whether it outstrips reality. By a most

fortunate happening, you saw the spectre, the astral body, whatever you choose to call it, of Mrs. Amworth, going on its grisly business, and therefore, beyond doubt, the vampire spirit which abode in her during life animates her again in death. That is not exceptional—indeed, all these weeks since her death I have been expecting it. If I am right, we shall find her body undecayed and untouched by corruption."

"But she has been dead nearly two months," said I.

"If she had been dead two years it would still be so, if the vampire has possession of her. So remember: whatever you see done, it will be done not to her, who in the natural course would now be feeding the grasses above her grave, but to a spirit of untold evil and malignancy, which gives a phantom life to her body."

"But what shall I see done?" said I.

"I will tell you. We know that now, at this moment, the vampire clad in her mortal semblance is out; dining out. But it must get back before dawn, and it will pass into the material form that lies in her grave. We must wait for that, and then with your help I shall dig up her body. If I am right, you will look on her as she was in life, with the full vigour of the dreadful nutriment she has received pulsing in her veins. And then, when dawn has come, and the vampire cannot leave the lair of her body, I shall strike her with this"—and he pointed to his pick—"through the heart, and she, who comes to life again only with the animation the fiend gives her, she and her hellish partner will be dead indeed. Then we must bury her again, delivered at last."

We had come to the cemetery, and in the brightness of the moonshine there was no difficulty in identifying her grave. It lay some twenty yards from the small chapel, in the porch of which, obscured by shadow, we concealed ourselves. From there we had a clear and open sight of the grave, and now we must wait till its infernal visitor returned home. The night was warm and windless, yet even if a freezing wind had been raging I think I should have felt nothing of it, so intense was my preoccupation as to what the night and dawn would bring. There was a bell in the turret of the chapel that struck the quarters of the hour, and it amazed me to find how swiftly the chimes succeeded one another.

The moon had long set, but a twilight of stars shone in a clear sky, when five o'clock of the morning sounded from the turret. A few minutes more passed, and then I felt Urcombe's hand softly nudging me; and looking out in the direction of his pointing finger, I saw that the form of a woman, tall and large in build, was approaching from the right. Noiselessly, with a motion more of gliding and floating than walking, she moved across the cemetery to the grave which was the centre of our observation. She moved round it as if to be certain of its identity, and for a moment stood directly facing us. In the greyness to which now my eyes had grown accustomed, I could easily see her face, and recognise its features.

She drew her hand across her mouth as if wiping it, and broke into a chuckle of such laughter as made my hair stir on my head. Then she leaped on to the

grave, holding her hands high above her head, and inch by inch disappeared into the earth. Urcombe's hand was laid on my arm, in an injunction to keep still, but now he removed it.

"Come," he said.

With pick and shovel and rope we went to the grave. The earth was light and sandy, and soon after six struck we had delved down to the coffin lid. With his pick he loosened the earth round it, and, adjusting the rope through the handles by which it had been lowered, we tried to raise it. This was a long and laborious business, and the light had begun to herald day in the east before we had it out, and lying by the side of the grave. With his screwdriver he loosed the fastenings of the lid, and slid it aside, and standing there we looked on the face of Mrs. Amworth. The eyes, once closed in death, were open, the cheeks were flushed with colour, the red, full-lipped mouth seemed to smile.

"One blow and it is all over," he said. "You need not look."

Even as he spoke he took up the pick again, and, laying the point of it on her left breast, measured his distance. And though I knew what was coming I could not look away. . . .

He grasped the pick in both hands, raised it an inch or two for the taking of his aim, and then with full force brought it down on her breast. A fountain of blood, though she had been dead so long, spouted high in the air, falling with the thud of a heavy splash over the shroud, and simultaneously from those red lips came one long, appalling cry, swelling up like some hooting siren, and dying away again. With that, instantaneous as a lightning flash, came the touch of corruption on her face, the colour of it faded to ash, the plump cheeks fell in, the mouth dropped.

"Thank God, that's over," said he, and without pause slipped the coffin lid back into its place.

Day was coming fast now, and, working like men possessed, we lowered the coffin into its place again, and shovelled the earth over it. . . . The birds were busy with their earliest pipings as we went back to Maxley.

Ambrose Bierce

MOXON'S MASTER

from Can Such Things Be?

Albert & Charles Boni

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"Are you serious? Do you really believe that a machine thinks?"

I got no immediate reply; Moxon was apparently intent upon the coals in the grate, touching them deftly here and there with the fire-poker till they signified a sense of his attention by a brighter glow. For several weeks I had been observing in him a growing habit of delay in answering even the most trivial of commonplace questions. His air, however, was that of preoccupation rather than deliberation: one might have said that he had "something on his mind."

Presently he said:

"What is a 'machine'? The word has been variously defined. Here is one definition from a popular dictionary: 'Any instrument or organization by which power is applied and made effective, or a desired effect produced.' Well, then, is not a man a machine? And you will admit that he thinks—or thinks he thinks."

"If you do not wish to answer my question," I said, rather testily, "why not say so? All that you say is mere evasion. You know well enough that when I say 'machine' I do not mean a man, but something that man has made and controls."

"When it does not control him," he said rising abruptly and looking out of a window, whence nothing was visible in the blackness of a stormy night. A moment later he turned about and with a smile said: "I beg your pardon; I had no thought of evasion. I considered the dictionary man's unconscious testimony suggestive and worth something in the discussion. I can give your question a direct answer easily enough: I do believe that a machine thinks about the work that it is doing."

That was direct enough, certainly. It was not altogether pleasing for it tended to confirm a sad suspicion that Moxon's devotion to study and work in his machine-shop had not been good for him. I knew, for one thing, that he suffered from insomnia, and that is no light affliction. Had it affected his mind? His reply to my question seemed to me then evidence that it had; perhaps I should think differently about it now. I was younger then, and among the blessings that are not denied to youth is ignorance. Incited by that great stimulant to controversy, I said:

"And what, pray, does it think with—in the absence of a brain?"

The reply, coming with less than his customary delay, took his favourite form of counter-interrogation:

"With what does a plant think—in the absence of a brain?"

"Ah, plants also belong to the philosopher class! I should be pleased to know some of their conclusions; you may omit the premises."

"Perhaps," he replied apparently unaffected by my foolish irony, "you may be able to infer their convictions from their acts. I will spare you the familiar examples of the sensitive mimosa, the several insectivorous flowers and those whose stamens bend down and shake their pollen upon the entering bee in order that he may fertilize their distant mates. But observe this. In an open spot in my garden I planted a climbing vine. When it was barely above the surface I set a stake into the soil a yard away. The vine at once made for it, but as it was about to reach it after several days I removed it a few feet. The vine at once altered its course, making an acute angle, and again made for the stake. This manœuvre was repeated several times, but finally, as if discouraged, the vine abandoned the pursuit and ignoring further attempts to divert it, travelled to a small tree, farther away, which it climbed.

"Roots of the eucalyptus will prolong themselves incredibly in search of moisture. A well-known horticulturist relates that one entered an old drain pipe and followed it until it came to a break, where a section of the pipe had been removed to make way for a stone wall that had been built across its course. The root left the drain and followed the wall until it found an opening where a stone had fallen out. It crept through, and following the other side of the wall back to the drain, entered the unexplored part and resumed its journey."

"And all this?"

"Can you miss the significance of it? It shows the consciousness of plants. It proves that they think."

"Even if it did—what then? We were speaking, not of plants, but of machines. They may be composed partly of wood—wood that has no longer vitality—or wholly of metals. Is thought an attribute also of the mineral kingdom?"

"How else do you explain the phenomena, for example, of crystallization?"

"I do not explain them."

"Because you cannot without affirming what you wish to deny, namely, intelligent co-operation among the constituent elements of the crystals. When soldiers form lines, or hollow squares, you call it reason. When wild geese in flight take the form of a letter V you say instinct. When the homogeneous atoms of a mineral, moving freely in solution, arrange themselves into shapes mathematically perfect, or particles of frozen moisture into the symmetrical and beautiful forms of snowflakes, you have nothing to say. You have not even invented a name to conceal your heroic unreason."

Moxon was speaking with unusual animation and earnestness. As he paused I heard in an adjoining room known to me as his "machine-shop," which no one but himself was permitted to enter, a singular thumping sound, as of some one pounding upon a table with an open hand. Moxon heard it at the same

moment and, visibly agitated, rose and hurriedly passed into the room whence it came. I thought it odd that anyone else should be in there, and my interest in my friend—with doubtless a touch of unwarrantable curiosity—led me to listen intently, though, I am happy to say, not at the keyhole. There were confused sounds, as of a struggle or scuffle; the floor shook. I distinctly heard hard breathing and a hoarse whisper which said, "Damn you!" Then all was silent, and presently Moxon reappeared and said, with a rather sorry smile:

"Pardon me for leaving you so abruptly. I have a machine in there that lost its temper and cut up rough."

Fixing my eyes steadily upon his left cheek, which was traversed by four parallel excoriations showing blood, I said:

"How would it do to trim its nails?"

I could have spared myself the jest; he gave it no attention, but seated himself in the chair that he had left and resumed the interrupted monologue as if nothing had occurred:

"Doubtless you do not hold with those (I need not name them to a man of your reading) who have taught that all matter is sentient, that every atom is a living, feeling, conscious being. *I* do. There is no such thing as dead, inert matter: it is all alive; all instinct with force, actual and potential; all sensitive to the same forces in its environment, and susceptible to the contagion of higher and subtler ones residing in such superior organisms as it may be brought into relation with, as those of man when he is fashioning it into an instrument of his will. It absorbs something of his intelligence and purpose—more of them in proportion to the complexity of the resulting machine and that of its work.

"Do you happen to recall Herbert Spencer's definition of 'Life'? I read it thirty years ago. He may have altered it afterward, for anything I know, but in all that time I have been unable to think of a single word that could profitably be changed or added or removed. It seems to me not only the best definition, but the only possible one.

" 'Life,' " he says, " 'is a definite combination of heterogeneous changes, both simultaneous and successive, in correspondence with external coexistences and sequences.' "

"That defines the phenomenon," I said, "but gives no hint of its cause."

"That," he replied, "is all that any definition can do. As Mill points out, we know nothing of cause except as an antecedent—nothing of effect except as a consequent. Of certain phenomena one never occurs without another, which is dissimilar: the first in point of time we call cause, the second, effect. One who had many times seen a rabbit pursued by a dog, and had never seen rabbits and dogs otherwise, would think the rabbit the cause of the dog.

"But I fear," he added, laughing naturally enough, "that my rabbit is leading me a long way from the track of my legitimate quarry: I'm indulging in the pleasure of the chase for its own sake. What I want you to observe is that in Herbert Spencer's definition of 'life' the activity of a machine is included—there is nothing in the definition that is not applicable to it. According to the sharpest of observers and deepest of thinkers, if a man during his period of activity is

alive, so is a machine when in operation. As an inventor and constructor of machines I know that to be true."

Moxon was silent for a long time, gazing absently into the fire. It was growing late and I thought it time to be going, but somehow I did not like the notion of leaving him in that isolated house, all alone except for the presence of some person of whose nature my conjectures could go no further than that it was unfriendly, perhaps malign. Leaning toward him and looking earnestly into his eyes while making a motion with my hand through the door of his workshop, I said:

"Moxon, whom have you in there?"

Somewhat to my surprise he laughed lightly and answered without hesitation:

"Nobody; the incident that you have in mind was caused by my folly in leaving a machine in action with nothing to act upon, while I undertook the interminable task of enlightening your understanding. Do you happen to know that Consciousness is the creature of Rhythm?"

"O bother them both!" I replied, rising and laying hold of my overcoat. "I'm going to wish you good night; and I'll add the hope that the machine which you inadvertently left in action will have her gloves on the next time you think it needful to stop her."

Without waiting to observe the effect of my shot I left the house.

Rain was falling, and the darkness was intense. In the sky beyond the crest of a hill toward which I groped my way along precarious plank sidewalks and across miry, unpaved streets, I could see the faint glow of the city's lights, but behind me nothing was visible but a single window of Moxon's house. It glowed with what seemed to me a mysterious and fateful meaning. I knew it was an uncurtained aperture in my friend's "machine-shop," and I had little doubt that he had resumed the studies interrupted by his duties as my instructor in mechanical consciousness and the fatherhood of Rhythm. Odd, and in some degree humorous, as his convictions seemed to me at that time, I could not wholly divest myself of the feeling that they had some tragic relation to his life and character—perhaps to his destiny—although I no longer entertained the notion that they were the vagaries of a disordered mind. Whatever might be thought of his views, his exposition of them was too logical for that. Over and over, his last words came back to me: "Consciousness is the creature of Rhythm." Bald and terse as the statement was, I now found it infinitely alluring. At each recurrence it broadened in meaning and deepened in suggestion. Why, here (I thought) is something upon which to found a philosophy. If Consciousness is the product of Rhythm all things *are* conscious, for all have motion, and all motion is rhythmic. I wondered if Moxon knew the significance and breadth of his thought—the scope of this momentous generalization; or had he arrived at his philosophic faith by the tortuous and uncertain road of observation?

That faith was then new to me, and all Moxon's expounding had failed to make me a convert; but now it seemed as if a great light shone about me, like that which fell upon Saul of Tarsus; and out there in the storm and darkness and solitude I experienced what Lewes calls "The endless variety and excite-

ment of philosophic thought." I exulted in a new sense of knowledge, a new pride of reason. My feet seemed hardly to touch the earth; it was as if I were uplifted and borne through the air by invisible wings.

Yielding to an impulse to seek further light from him whom I now recognised as my master and guide, I had unconsciously turned about, and almost before I was aware of having done so, found myself again at Moxon's door. I was drenched with rain, but felt no discomfort. Unable in my excitement to find the doorbell I instinctively tried the knob. It turned and, entering, I mounted the stairs to the room that I had so recently left. All was dark and silent; Moxon, as I had supposed, was in the adjoining room—the "machine-shop." Groping along the wall until I found the communication door, I knocked loudly several times, but got no response, which I attributed to the uproar outside, for the wind was blowing a gale and dashing the rain against the thin walls in sheets. The drumming upon the shingle roof spanning the unceiled room was loud and incessant.

I had never been invited into the machine-shop—had, indeed, been denied admittance, as had all others, with one exception, a skilled metal worker, of whom no one knew anything except that his name was Haley and his habit silence. But in my spiritual exaltation, discretion and civility were alike forgotten, and I opened the door. What I saw took all philosophical speculation out of me in short order.

Moxon sat facing me at the farther side of a small table upon which a single candle made all the light that was in the room. Opposite him, his back toward me, sat another person. On the table between the two was a chess-board; the men were playing. I knew little of chess, but as only a few pieces were on the board it was obvious that the game was near its close. Moxon was intensely interested—not so much, it seemed to me, in the game as in his antagonist, upon whom he had fixed so intent a look that, standing though I did directly in the line of his vision, I was altogether unobserved. His face was ghastly white, and his eyes glittered like diamonds. Of his antagonist I had only a back view, but that was sufficient; I should not have cared to see his face.

He was apparently not more than five feet in height, with proportions suggesting those of a gorilla—a tremendous breadth of shoulders, thick, short neck and broad, squat head, which had a tangled growth of black hair and was topped with a crimson fez. A tunic of the same colour, belted tightly to the waist, reached the seat—apparently a box—upon which he sat; his legs and feet were not seen. His left forearm appeared to rest in his lap; he moved his pieces with his right hand, which seemed disproportionately long.

I had shrunk back and now stood a little to one side of the doorway and in shadow. If Moxon had looked farther than the face of his opponent he could have observed nothing now, except that the door was open. Something forbade me either to enter or to retire, a feeling—I know not how it came—that I was in the presence of an imminent tragedy and might serve my friend by remaining. With a scarcely conscious rebellion against the indelicacy of the act, I remained.

The play was rapid. Moxon hardly glanced at the board before making his

moves, and to my unskilled eye seemed to move the piece most convenient to his hand, his motions in doing so being quick, nervous and lacking in precision. The response of his antagonist, while equally prompt in the inception, was made with a slow, uniform, mechanical and, I thought, somewhat theatrical movement of the arm, that was a sore trial to my patience. There was something unearthly about it all, and I caught myself shuddering. But I was wet and cold.

Two or three times after moving a piece the stranger slightly inclined his head, and each time I observed that Moxon shifted his king. All at once the thought came to me that the man was dumb. And then that he was a machine—an automaton chess-player! Then I remembered that Moxon had once spoken to me of having invented such a piece of mechanism, though I did not understand that it had actually been constructed. Was all this talk about the consciousness and intelligence of machines merely a prelude to eventual exhibition of this device—only a trick to intensify the effect of its mechanical action upon me in my ignorance of its secret?

A fine end this, of all my intellectual transports—my "endless variety and excitement of philosophic thought"! I was about to retire in disgust when something occurred to hold my curiosity. I observed a shrug of the thing's great shoulders, as if it were irritated: and so natural was this—so entirely human—that in my new view of the matter it startled me. Nor was that all, for a moment later it struck the table sharply with its clenched hand. At that gesture Moxon seemed even more startled than I: he pushed his chair a little backwards, as in alarm.

Presently Moxon, whose play it was, raised his hand high above the board, pounced upon one of his pieces like a sparrow-hawk, and with the exclamation "checkmate!" rose quickly to his feet and stepped behind his chair. The automaton sat motionless.

The wind had now gone down, but I heard, at lessening intervals and progressively louder, the rumble and roll of thunder. In the pauses between I now became conscious of a low humming or buzzing which, like the thunder, grew momentarily louder and more distinct. It seemed to come from the body of the automaton, and was unmistakably a whirring of wheels. It gave me the impression of a disordered mechanism which had escaped the repressive and regulating action of some controlling part—an effect such as might be expected if a pawl should be jostled from the teeth of a ratchet-wheel. But before I had time for much conjecture as to its nature my attention was taken by the strange motions of the automaton itself. A slight but continuous convulsion appeared to have possession of it. In body and head, it shook like a man with palsy or an ague chill, and the motion augmented every moment until the entire figure was in violent agitation. Suddenly it sprang to its feet and with a movement almost too quick for the eye to follow shot forward across table and chair, with both arms thrust forth to their full length—the posture and lunge of a diver. Moxon tried to throw himself backward out of reach, but he was too late: I saw the horrible thing's hands close upon his throat, his own clutch its wrists. Then the table was overturned, the candle thrown to the floor and extinguished, and all was black dark. But the noise of the struggle was dreadfully distinct, and most

terrible of all were the raucous, squawking sounds made by the strangled man's efforts to breathe. Guided by the infernal hubbub, I sprang to the rescue of my friend, but had hardly taken a stride in the darkness when the whole room blazed with a blinding white light that burned into my brain and heart and memory a vivid picture of the combatants on the floor, Moxon underneath, his throat still in the clutch of those iron hands, his head forced backward, his eyes protruding, his mouth wide open and his tongue thrust out; and—horrible contrast!—upon the painted face of his assassin an expression of tranquil and profound thought, as in the solution of a problem in chess! This I observed, then all was blackness and silence.

Three days later I recovered consciousness in a hospital. As the memory of that tragic night slowly evolved in my ailing brain I recognized in my attendant Moxon's confidential workman, Haley. Responding to a look he approached, smiling.

"Tell me about it," I managed to say, faintly—"all about it."

"Certainly," he said; "you were carried unconscious from a burning house—Moxon's. Nobody knows how you came to be there. You may have to do a little explaining. The origin of the fire is a bit mysterious, too. My own notion is that house was struck by lightning."

"And Moxon?"

"Buried yesterday—what was left of him."

Apparently this reticent person could unfold himself on occasion. When imparting shocking intelligence to the sick he was affable enough. After some moments of the keenest mental suffering I ventured to ask another question:

"Who rescued me?"

"Well, if that interests you—I did."

"Thank you, Mr. Haley, and may God bless you for it. Did you rescue, also, that charming product of your skill, the automaton chess-player that murdered its inventor?"

The man was silent a long time, looking away from me. Presently he turned and gravely said:

"Do you know that?"

"I do," I replied: "I saw it done."

That was many years ago. If asked to-day I should answer less confidently.

Jerome K. Jerome

THE DANCING-PARTNER

from Novel Notes

"Idler," 1893

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This story," commenced MacShaugnassy, "comes from Furtwangen, a small town in the Black Forest. There lived there a very wonderful old fellow named Nicholaus Geibel. His business was the making of mechanical toys, at which work he had acquired an almost European reputation. He made rabbits that would emerge from the heart of a cabbage, flop their ears, smooth their whiskers, and disappear again; cats that would wash their faces, and mew so naturally that dogs would mistake them for real cats, and fly at them; dolls, with phonographs concealed within them, that would raise their hats and say, 'Good morning; how do you do?' and some that would even sing a song.

"But he was something more than a mere mechanic; he was an artist. His work was with him a hobby, almost a passion. His shop was filled with all manner of strange things that never would, or could, be sold—things he had made for the pure love of making them. He had contrived a mechanical donkey that would trot for two hours by means of stored electricity, and trot, too, much faster than the live article, and with less need for exertion on the part of the driver; a bird that would shoot up into the air, fly round and round in a circle, and drop to earth at the exact spot from where it started; a skeleton that, supported by an upright iron bar, would dance a hornpipe; a life-size lady doll that could play the fiddle; and a gentleman with a hollow inside who could smoke a pipe and drink more lager beer than any three average German students put together, which is saying much.

"Indeed, it was the belief of the town that old Geibel could make a man capable of doing everything that a respectable man need want to do. One day he made a man who did too much, and it came about in this way:

"Young Doctor Follen had a baby, and the baby had a birthday. Its first birthday put Doctor Follen's household into somewhat of a flurry, but on the occasion of its second birthday, Mrs. Doctor Follen gave a ball in honour of the event. Old Geibel and his daughter Olga were among the guests.

"During the afternoon of the next day some three or four of Olga's bosom friends, who had also been present at the ball, dropped in to have a chat about it. They naturally fell to discussing the men, and to criticising their dancing. Old

Geibel was in the room, but he appeared to be absorbed in his newspaper, and the girls took no notice of him.

"'There seem to be fewer men who can dance at every ball you go to,' said one of the girls.

"'Yes, and don't the ones who can give themselves airs,' said another; 'they make quite a favour of asking you.'

"'And how stupidly they talk,' added a third. 'They always say exactly the same things: "How charming you are looking tonight." "Do you often go to Vienna? Oh, you should, it's delightful." "What a charming dress you have on." "What a warm day it has been." "Do you like Wagner?" I do wish they'd think of something new.'

"'Oh, I never mind how they talk,' said a fourth. 'If a man dances well he may be a fool for all I care.'

"'He generally is,' slipped in a thin girl, rather spitefully.

"'I go to a ball to dance,' continued the previous speaker, not noticing the interruption. 'All I ask of a partner is that he shall hold me firmly, take me round steadily, and not get tired before I do.'

"'A clockwork figure would be the thing for you,' said the girl who had interrupted.

"'Bravo!' cried one of the others, clapping her hands, 'what a capital idea!'

"'What's a capital idea?' they asked.

"'Why, a clockwork dancer, or, better still, one that would go by electricity and never run down.'

"The girls took up the idea with enthusiasm.

"'Oh, what a lovely partner he would make,' said one; 'he would never kick you, or tread on your toes.'

"'Or tear your dress,' said another.

"'Or get out of step.'

"'Or get giddy and lean on you.'

"'And he would never want to mop his face with his handkerchief. I do hate to see a man do that after every dance.'

"'And wouldn't want to spend the whole evening in the supper room.'

"'Why, with a phonograph inside him to grind out all the stock remarks, you would not be able to tell him from a real man,' said the girl who had first suggested the idea.

"'Oh, yes, you would,' said the thin girl, 'he would be so much nicer.'

"Old Geibel had laid down his paper, and was listening with both his ears. On one of the girls glancing in his direction, however, he hurriedly hid himself again behind it.

"After the girls were gone, he went into his workshop, where Olga heard him walking up and down, and every now and then chuckling to himself; and that night he talked to her a good deal about dancing and dancing men—asked what they usually said and did—what dances were most popular—what steps were gone through, with many other questions bearing on the subject.

"Then for a couple of weeks he kept much to his factory, and was very thought-

ful and busy, though prone at unexpected moments to break into a quiet low laugh, as if enjoying a joke that nobody else knew of.

"A month later another ball took place in Furtwangen. On this occasion it was given by old Wenzel, the wealthy timber merchant, to celebrate his niece's betrothal, and Geibel and his daughter were again among the invited.

"When the hour arrived to set out, Olga sought her father. Not finding him in the house, she tapped at the door of his workshop. He appeared in his shirt-sleeves, looking hot but radiant.

" 'Don't wait for me,' he said, 'you go on, I'll follow you. I've got something to finish.'

"As she turned to obey he called after her, 'Tell them I'm going to bring a young man with me—such a nice young man, and an excellent dancer. All the girls will like him.' Then he laughed and closed the door.

"Her father generally kept his doings secret from everybody, but she had a pretty shrewd suspicion of what he had been planning, and so, to a certain extent, was able to prepare the guests for what was coming. Anticipation ran high, and the arrival of the famous mechanist was eagerly awaited.

"At length the sound of wheels was heard outside, followed by a great commotion in the passage, and old Wenzel himself, his jolly face red with excitement and suppressed laughter, burst into the room and announced in stentorian tones:

" 'Herr Geibel—and a friend.'

"Herr Geibel and his 'friend' entered, greeted with shouts of laughter and applause, and advanced to the centre of the room.

" 'Allow me, ladies and gentlemen,' said Herr Geibel, 'to introduce you to my friend, Lieutenant Fritz. Fritz, my dear fellow, bow to the ladies and gentlemen.'

"Geibel placed his hand encouragingly on Fritz's shoulder, and the lieutenant bowed low, accompanying the action with a harsh clicking noise in his throat, unpleasantly suggestive of a death rattle. But that was only a detail.

" 'He walks a little stiffly' (old Geibel took his arm and walked him forward a few steps. He certainly did walk stiffly), 'but then, walking is not his forte. He is essentially a dancing man. I have only been able to teach him the waltz as yet, but at that he is faultless. Come, which of you ladies may I introduce him to as a partner. He keeps perfect time; he never gets tired; he won't kick you or tread on your dress; he will hold you as firmly as you like, and go as quickly or as slowly as you please; he never gets giddy; and he is full of conversation. Come, speak up for yourself, my boy.'

"The old gentleman twisted one of the buttons at the back of his coat, and immediately Fritz opened his mouth, and in thin tones that appeared to proceed from the back of his head, remarked suddenly, 'May I have the pleasure?' and then shut his mouth again with a snap.

"That Lieutenant Fritz had made a strong impression on the company was undoubted, yet none of the girls seemed inclined to dance with him. They

looked askance at his waxen face, with his staring eyes and fixed smile, and shuddered. At last old Geibel came to the girl who had conceived the idea.

" 'It is your own suggestion, carried out to the letter,' said Geibel, 'an electric dancer. You owe it to the gentleman to give him a trial.'

"She was a bright, saucy little girl, fond of a frolic. Her host added his entreaties, and she consented.

"Herr Geibel fixed the figure to her. Its right arm was screwed round her waist, and held her firmly; its delicately-jointed left hand was made to fasten itself upon her right. The old toymaker showed her how to regulate its speed, and how to stop it, and release herself.

" 'It will take you round in a complete circle,' he explained; 'be careful that no one knocks against you, and alters its course.'

"The music struck up. Old Geibel put the current in motion, and Annette and her strange partner began to dance.

"For a while everyone stood watching them. The figure performed its purpose admirably. Keeping perfect time and step, and holding its little partner tight clasped in an unyielding embrace, it revolved steadily, pouring forth at the same time a constant flow of squeaky conversation, broken by brief intervals of grinding silence.

" 'How charming you are looking to-night,' it remarked in its thin, far-away voice. 'What a lovely day it has been. Do you like dancing? How well our steps agree. You will give me another, won't you? Oh, don't be so cruel. What a charming gown you have on. Isn't waltzing delightful? I could go on dancing for ever—with you. Have you had supper?'

"As she grew more familiar with the uncanny creature, the girl's nervousness wore off, and she entered into the fun of the thing.

" 'Oh, he's just lovely,' she cried, laughing. 'I could go on dancing with him all my life.'

"Couple after couple now joined them, and soon all the dancers in the room were whirling round behind them. Nicholaus Geibel stood looking on, beaming with childish delight at his success.

"Old Wenzel approached him, and whispered something in his ear. Geibel laughed and nodded, and the two worked their way quietly towards the door.

" 'This is the young people's house to-night,' said Wenzel, so soon as they were outside; 'you and I will have a quiet pipe and a glass of hock, over in the counting-house.'

"Meanwhile the dancing grew more fast and furious. Little Annette loosened the screw regulating her partner's rate of progress, and the figure flew round with her swifter and swifter. Couple after couple dropped out exhausted, but they only went the faster, till at length they remained dancing alone.

"Madder and madder became the waltz. The music lagged behind: the musicians, unable to keep the pace, ceased, and sat staring. The younger guests applauded, but the older faces began to grow anxious.

" 'Hadn't you better stop, dear,' said one of the women, 'you'll make yourself so tired.'

"But Annette did not answer.

" 'I believe she's fainted,' cried out a girl who had caught sight of her face as it was swept by.

"One of the men sprang forward and clutched at the figure, but its impetus threw him down on to the floor, where its steel-cased feet laid bare his cheek. The thing evidently did not intend to part with its prize easily.

"Had anyone retained a cool head, the figure, one cannot help thinking, might easily have been stopped. Two or three men acting in concert might have lifted it bodily off the floor, or have jammed it into a corner. But few human heads are capable of remaining cool under excitement. Those who were not present think how stupid must have been those who were; those who are reflect afterwards how simple it would have been to do this, that, or the other, if only they had thought of it at the time.

"The women grew hysterical. The men shouted contradictory directions to one another. Two of them made a bungling rush at the figure, which had the result of forcing it out of its orbit in the centre of the room, and sending it crashing against the walls and furniture. A stream of blood showed itself down the girl's white frock, and followed her along the floor. The affair was becoming horrible. The women rushed screaming from the room. The men followed them.

"One sensible suggestion was made: 'Find Geibel—fetch Geibel.'

"No one had noticed him leave the room, no one knew where he was. A party went in search of him. The others, too unnerved to go back into the ball-room, crowded outside the door and listened. They could hear the steady whir of the wheels upon the polished floor as the thing spun round and round; the dull thud as every now and again it dashed itself and its burden against some opposing object and ricocheted off in a new direction.

"And everlastingly it talked in that thin ghostly voice, repeating over and over the same formula: 'How charming you are looking to-night. What a lovely day it has been. Oh, don't be so cruel. I could go on dancing for ever—with you. Have you had supper?'

"Of course they sought for Geibel everywhere but where he was. They looked in every room in the house, then rushed off in a body to his own place, and spent precious minutes in waking up his deaf old housekeeper. At last it occurred to one of the party that Wenzel was missing also, and then the idea of the counting-house across the yard presented itself to them, and there they found him.

"He rose up, very pale, and followed them; and he and old Wenzel forced their way through the crowd of guests gathered outside, and entered the room, and locked the door behind them.

"From within there came the muffled sound of low voices and quick steps, followed by a confused scuffling noise, then silence, then the low voices again.

"After a time the door opened, and those near it pressed forward to enter, but old Wenzel's broad shoulders barred the way.

" 'I want you—and you, Bekler,' he said, addressing a couple of the elder men. His voice was calm, but his face was deadly white. 'The rest of you, please go—get the women away as quickly as you can.'

"From that day old Nicholaus Geibel confined himself to the making of mechanical rabbits, and cats that mewed and washed their faces."

Robert Louis Stevenson

THRAWN JANET

from The Merry Men and Other Tales

Charles Scribner's Sons

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The Reverend Murdoch Soulis was long minister of the moorland parish of Balweary, in the vale of Dule. A severe, bleak-faced old man, dreadful to his hearers, he dwelt in the last years of his life, without relative or servant or any human company, in the small and lonely manse under the Hanging Shaw. In spite of the iron composure of his features, his eye was wild, scared, and uncertain; and when he dwelt, in private admonition, on the future of the impenitent, it seemed as if his eye pierced through the storms of time to the terrors of eternity. Many young persons, coming to prepare themselves against the season of the Holy Communion, were dreadfully affected by his talk. He had a sermon on 1st Peter, v. and 8th, "The devil as a roaring lion," on the Sunday after every seventeenth of August, and he was accustomed to surpass himself upon that text both by the appalling nature of the matter and the terror of his bearing in the pulpit. The children were frightened into fits, and the old looked more than usually oracular, and were, all that day, full of those hints that Hamlet deprecated. The manse itself, where it stood by the water of Dule among some thick trees, with the Shaw overhanging on the one side, and on the other many cold, moorish hill-tops rising toward the sky, had begun, at a very early period of Mr. Soulis's ministry, to be avoided in the dusk hours by all who valued themselves upon their prudence; and guidmen sitting at the clachan alehouse shook their heads together at the thought of passing late by that uncanny neighbourhood. There was one spot, to be more particular, which was regarded with especial awe. The manse stood between the highroad and the water of Dule, with a gable to each; its back was towards the kirktown of Balweary, nearly half a mile away; in front of it, a bare garden, hedged with thorn, occupied the land between the river and the road. The house was two stories high, with two large rooms on each. It opened not directly on the garden but on a causewayed path, or passage, giving on the road on the one hand, and closed on the other by the tall willows and elders that bordered on the stream. And it was this strip of causeway that enjoyed among the young parishioners of Balweary so infamous a reputation. The

minister walked there often after dark, sometimes groaning aloud in the instancy of his unspoken prayers; and when he was from home, and the manse door was locked, the more daring schoolboys ventured, with beating hearts, to "follow my leader" across that legendary spot.

This atmosphere of terror, surrounding, as it did, a man of God of spotless character and orthodoxy, was a common cause of wonder and subject of enquiry among the few strangers who were led by chance or business into that unknown, outlying country. But many even of the people of the parish were ignorant of the strange events which had marked the first year of Mr. Soulis's ministrations; and among those who were better informed, some were naturally reticent, and others shy of that particular topic. Now and again, only one of the older folk would warm into courage over his third tumbler, and recount the cause of the minister's strange looks and solitary life.

Fifty years syne, when Mr. Soulis cam' first into Ba'weary, he was still a young man—a callant, the folk said—fu' o' book-learnin' an' grand at the exposition, but, as was natural in sae young a man, wi' nae leevin' experience in religion. The younger sort were greatly taken wi' his gifts and his gab; but auld, concerned, serious men and women were moved even to prayer for the young man, whom they took to be a self-deceiver, and the parish that was like to be sae ill-supplied. It was before the days o' the moderates—weary fa' them; but ill things are like guid—they baith come bit by bit, a pickle at a time; and there were folk even then that said the Lord had left the college professors to their ain devices, an' the lads that went to study wi' them wad hae done mair an' better sittin' in a peat-bog, like their forbears of the persecution, wi' a Bible under their oxter an' a speerit o' prayer in their hearts. There was nae doubt onyway, but that Mr. Soulis had been ower lang at the college. He was careful and troubled for mony things besides the ae thing needful. He had a feck o' books wi' him—mair than had ever been seen before in a' that presbytery; and a sair wark the carrier had wi' them, for they were a' like to have smoored in the De'il's Hag between this and Kilmackerlie. They were books o' divinity, to be sure, or so they ca'd them; but the serious were o' opinion there was little service for sae money, when the hail o' God's Word would gang in the neuk o' a plaid. Then he wad sit half the day and half the nicht forbye, which was scant decent—writin' nae less; an' first they were feared he wad read his sermons; an' syne it proved he was writin' a book himsel', which was surely no' fittin' for ane o' his years an' sma' experience.

Onyway it behoved him to get an auld, decent wife to keep the manse for him an' see to his bit denners; an' he was recommended to an auld limmer—Janet M'Clour, they ca'd her—an' sae far left to himsel' as to be ower persuaded. There was mony advised him to the contrar, for Janet was mair than suspeckit by the best folk in Ba'weary. Lang or that, she had had a wean to a dragoon; she hadna come forrit[1] for maybe thretty year; and bairns had seen her mumblin' to hersel' up on Key's Loan in the gloamin', whilk was an unco time an' place for a

[1] "To come forrit"—to offer oneself as a communicant.

God-fearin' woman. Howsoever, it was the laird himsel' that had first tauld the minister o' Janet; an' in thae days he wad hae gane a far gate to pleesure the laird. When folk tauld him that Janet was sib to the de'il, it was a' superstition by his way o' it; an' when they cast up the Bible to him an' the witch of Endor, he wad threep it doun their trapples that thir days were a' gane by, an' the de'il was mercifully restrained.

Weel, when it got about the clachan that Janet M'Clour was to be servant at the manse, the folk were fair mad wi' her an' him thegither; an' some o' the guidwives had nae better to dae then get round her door-cheeks and chairge her wi' a' that was ken't again' her, fre the sodger's bairn to John Tamson's twa kye. She was nae great speaker; folk usually let her gang her ain gate, an' she let them gang theirs, wi' neither Fair-guid-een nor Fair-guid-day; but when she buckled to, she had a tongue to deave the miller. Up she got, an' there wasna an auld story in Ba'weary but she gart somebody lowp for it that day; they couldna say ae thing but she could say twa to it; till, at the hinder end, the guidwives up an' claught haud of her, an' clawed the coats aff her back, and pu'd her doun the clachan to the water o' Dule, to see if she were a witch or no, soom or droun. The carline skirled till ye could hear her at the Hangin' Shaw, an' she focht like ten; there was mony a guidwife bore the mark o' her neist day an' mony a lang day after; an' just in the hettest o' the collieshangie, wha suld come up (for his sins) but the new minister!

"Women," said he (an' he had a grand voice), "I charge you in the Lord's name to let her go."

Janet ran to him—she was fair wud wi' terror—an' clang to him, an' prayed him, for Christ's sake, save her frae the cummers; an' they, for their part, tauld him a' that was ken't, an' maybe mair.

"Woman," says he to Janet, "is this true?"

"As the Lord sees me," says she, "as the Lord made me, no' a word o't. Forbye the bairn," says she, "I've been a decent woman a' my days."

"Will you," says Mr. Soulis, "in the name of God, and before me, His unworthy minister, renounce the devil and his works?"

Weel, it wad appear that when he askit that, she gave a girn that fairly frichit them that saw her, an' they could hear her teeth play dirl thegither in her chafts; but there was naething for it but the ae way or the ither; an' Janet lifted up her hand an' renounced the de'il before them a'.

"And now," says Mr. Soulis to the guidwives, "home with ye, one and all, and pray to God for His forgiveness."

An' he gied Janet his arm, though she had little on her but a sark, and took her up to the clachan to her ain door like a leddy o' the land; an' her screighin' an' laughin' as was a scandal to be heard.

There were mony grave folk lang ower their prayers that nicht; but when the morn cam' there was sic a fear fell upon a' Ba'weary that the bairns hid theirsels, an' even the men-folk stood an' keekit frae their doors. For there was Janet comin' doun the clachan—her or her likeness, nane could tell—wi' her neck thrawn, an' her heid on ae side, like a body that has been hangit, an' a grin on

her face like an unstreakit corp. By an' by they got used wi' it, an' even speered at her to ken what was wrang; but frae that day forth she couldna speak like a Christian woman, but slavered an' played click wi' her teeth like a pair o' shears; an' frae that day forth the name o' God cam' never on her lips. Whiles she wad try to say it, but it michtna be. Them that kenned best said least; but they never geid that Thing the name o' Janet M'Clour; for the auld Janet, by their way o't, was in muckle hell that day. But the minister was neither to haud nor to bind; he preached about naething but the folk's cruelty that had gi'en her a stroke of the palsy; he skelpit the bairns that meddled her; an' he had her up to the manse that same nicht, an' dwalled there a' his line wi' her under the Hangin' Shaw.

Weel, time gaed by: and the idler sort commenced to think mair lichtly o' that black business. The minister was well thought o'; he was aye late at the writing, folk wad see his can'le doon by the Dule water after twal' at e'en; and he seemed pleased wi' himsel' an' upsitten as at first, though a' body could see that he was dwining. As for Janet she cam' an' she gaed; if she didna speak muckle afore, it was reason she should speak less then; she meddled naebody; but she was an eldritch thing to see, an' nane wad hae mistrysted wi' her for Ba'weary glebe.

About the end o' July there cam' a spell o' weather, the like o't never was in that country-side; it was lown an' het an' heartless; the herds couldna win up the Black Hill, the bairns were ower weariet to play; an' yet it was gousty too, wi' claps o' het wund that rumm'led in the glens, and bits o' shouers that slockened naething. We aye thocht it büt to thun'er on the morn; but the morn cam', an' the morn's morning, an' it was aye the same uncanny weather, sair on folks and bestial. O' a' that were the waur, nane suffered like Mr. Soulis; he could neither sleep nor eat, he tauld his elders; an' when he wasna writin' at his weary book, he wad be stravaguin' ower a' the country-side like a man possessed, when a' body else was blithe to keep caller ben the house.

Abune Hangin' Shaw, in the bield o' the Black Hill, there's a bit enclosed ground wi' an iron yett; an' it seems, in the auld days, that was the kirkyard o' Ba'weary, an' consecrated by the Papists before the blessed licht shone upon the kingdom. It was a great howff, o' Mr. Soulis's onyway; there he wad sit an' consider his sermons; an' indeed it's a bieldy bit. Weel, as he cam' ower the wast end o' the Black Hill, ae day, he saw first twa, an' syne fower, an' syne seeven corbie craws fleein' round an' round abune the auld kirkyard. They flew laigh an' heavy, an' squawked to ither as they gaed; an' it was clear to Mr. Soulis that something had put them frae their ordinar. He wasna easy fleyed, an' gaed straucht up to the wa's; an' what suld he find there but a man, or the appearance o' a man, sittin' in the inside upon a grave. He was of a great stature, an' black as hell, and his e'en were singular to see.[2] Mr. Soulis had heard tell o' black men, mony's the time; but there was something unco about this black man that daunted him. Het

[2] It was a common belief in Scotland that the devil appeared as a black man. This appears in several witch trials and I think in Law's *Memorials*, that delightful storehouse of the quaint and grisly.—R. L. S.

as he was, he took a kind o' cauld grue in the marrow o' his banes; but up he spak for a' that; an' says he: "My friend, are you a stranger in this place?" The black man answered never a word; he got upon his feet, an' begoud on to hirsle to the wa' on the far side; but he aye lookit at the minister; an' the minister stood an' lookit back; till a' in a meenit the black man was ower the wa' an' rinnin' for the bield o' the trees. Mr. Soulis, he hardly kenned why, ran after him; but he was fair forjeskit wi' his walk an' the het, unhalesome weather; an' rin as he likit, he got nae mair than a glisk o' the black man amang the birks, till he won doun to the foot o' the hillside, an' there he saw him ance mair, gaun, hap-step-an'-lawp, ower Dule water to the manse.

Mr. Soulis wasna pleased that this fearsome gangrel suld mak' sae free wi' Ba'weary manse; an' he ran the harder, an', wet shoon, ower the burn, an' up the walk; but the de'il a black man was there to see. He stepped out upon the road, but there was naebody there; he gaed a' ower the gairden, but na, nae black man. At the hinder end, an' a bit feared as was but natural, he lifted the hasp an' into the manse; and there was Janet M'Clour before his e'en, wi' her thrawn craig, an' nane sae pleased to see him. An' he aye minded sinsyne, when first he set his e'en upon her, he had the same cauld and deidly grue.

"Janet," says he, "have you seen a black man?"

"A black man!" quo' she. "Save us a'! Ye're no wise, minister. There's nae black man in a' Ba'weary."

But she didna speak plain, ye maun understand; but yam-yammered, like a powney wi' the bit in its moo.

"Weel," says he, "Janet, if there was na black man, I have spoken with the Acuser of the Brethren."

An' he sat doun like ane wi' a fever, an' his teeth chittered in his heid.

"Hoots," says she, "think shame to yoursel', minister"; an' gied him a drap brandy that she keept aye by her.

Syne Mr. Soulis gaed into his study amang a' his books. It's a lang, laigh, mirk chalmer, perishin' cauld in winter, an' no' very dry even in the top o' the simmer, for the manse stands near the burn. Sae doun he sat, and thocht of a' that had come an' gane since he was in Ba'weary, an' his hame, a' the days when he was a bairn an' ran daffin' on the braes; an' that black man aye ran in his heid like the owercome of a sang. Aye the mair he thocht, the mair he thocht o' the black man. He tried the prayer, an' the words wouldna come to him; an' he tried, they say, to write at his book, but he couldna mak' mair o' that. There was whiles he thocht the black man was at his oxter, an' the swat stood upon him cauld as well-water; and there was ither whiles, when he cam' to himsel' like a christened bairn an' minded naething.

The upshot was that he gaed to the window an' stood glowrin' at Dule water. The trees are unco thick, an' the water lies deep an' black under the manse; an' there was Janet washin' the cla'es wi' her coats kilted. She had her back to the minister, an' he, for his pairt, hardly kenned what he was lookin' at. Syne she turned round, an' shawed her face; Mr. Soulis had the same cauld grue as twice that day afore, an' it was borne in upon him what folk said, that Janet was died

lang syne, an' this was a bogle in her clay-cauld flesh. He drew back a pickle and he scanned her narrowly. She was tramp-trampin' in the cla'es croonin' to hersel'; and eh! Gude guide us, but it was a fearsome face. Whiles she sang louder, but there was nae man born o' woman that could tell the words o' her sang; an' whiles she lookit side-land doun, but there was naething there for her to look at. There gaed a scunner through the flesh upon his banes; an' that was Heeven's advertisement. But Mr. Soulis just blamed himsel', he said, to think sae ill o' a puir, auld afflicted wife that hadna a freend forbye himsel'; an' he put up a bit prayer for him an' her, an' drank a little caller water—for his heart rose again' the meat—an' gaed up to his naked bed in the gloamin'.

That was a nicht that has never been forgotten in Ba'weary, the night o' the seeventeenth o' August, seeventeen hun'er' an' twal'. It had been het afore, as I hae said, but that nicht it was hetter than ever. The sun gaed doun amang unco-lookin' clouds; it fell as mirk as the pit; no' a star, no' a breath o' wund; ye couldna see your han' afore your face, an even the auld folk cuist the covers frae their beds a' lay pechin' for their breath. Wi' a' that he had upon his mind, it was gey an' unlikely Mr. Soulis wad get muckle sleep. He lay an' he tummled; the gude, caller bed that he got into brunt his very banes; whiles he slept, an' whiles he waukened; whiles he heard the time o' nicht, an' whiles a tyke yowlin' up the muir, as if somebody was deid; whiles he thocht he heard bogles claverin' in his lug, an' whiles he saw spunkies in the room. He behooved, he judged, to be sick; an' sick he was—little he jaloosed the sickness.

At the hinder end, he got a clearness in his mind, sat up in his sark on the bed-side, an' fell thinkin' ance mair o' the black man an' Janet. He couldna weel tell how—maybe it was the cauld to his feet—but it cam' in upon him wi' a spate that there was some connection between thir twa, an' that either or baith o' them were bogles. An' just at that moment, in Janet's room, which was neist to his, there cam' a stramp o' feet as if men were wars'lin', an' then a loud bang; an' then a wund gaed reishling round the fower quarters o' the house; an' then a' was ance mair as seelent as the grave.

Mr. Soulis was feared for neither man nor de'il. He got his tinder-box, an' lit a can'le, an' made three steps o't ower to Janet's door. It was on the hasp, an' he pushed it open, an' keeked bauldly in. It was a big room, as big as the minister's ain, an' plenished wi' grand, auld solid gear, for he had naething else. There was a fower-posted bed wi' auld tapestry; an' a braw cabinet o' aik, that was fu' o' the minister's divinity books, an' put there to be out o' the gate; an' a wheen duds o' Janet's lying here an' there about the floor. But nae Janet could Mr. Soulis see; nor ony sign o' a contention. In he gaed (an' there's few that wad hae followed him) an' lookit a' round, an' listened. But there was naething to be heard, neither inside the manse nor in a' Ba'weary parish, an' naething to be seen but the muckle shadows turnin' round the can'le. An' then, a' at aince, the minister's heart played dunt a' stood stock-still; an' a cauld wund blew amang the hairs o' his heid. Whaten a weary sicht was that for the puir man's e'en! For there was Janet hangin' frae a nail beside the auld aik cabinet: her heid aye lay

on her shouther, her e'en were steekit, the tongue projected frae her mouth, an' her heels wer twa feet clear abune the floor.

"God forgive us all!" thocht Mr. Soulis, "poor Janet's dead."

He cam' a step nearer to the corp; an' then his heart fair whammled in his inside. For by what cantrip it wad ill beseem a man to judge, she was hangin' frae a single nail an' by a single wursted thread for darnin' hose.

It's a awfu' thing to be your lane at nicht wi' siccan prodigies o' darkness; but Mr. Soulis was strong in the Lord. He turned an' gaed his ways oot o' that room, an' lookit the door ahint him; an' step by step, doun the stairs, as heavy as leed; and set doun the can'le on the table at the stairfoot. He couldna pray, he couldna think, he was dreepin' wi' caul' swat, an' naething could he hear but the dunt-dunt-duntin' o' his ain heart. He micht maybe hae stood there an hour, or maybe twa, he minded sae little; when a' o' a sudden, he heard a laigh, uncanny steer upstairs; a foot gaed to an' fro in the chalmer whaur the corp was hangin'; syne the door was opened, though he minded weel that he had lockit it; an' syne there was a step upon the landin', an' it seemed to him as if the corp was lookin' ower the rail and doun upon him whaur he stood.

He took up the can'le again (for he couldna want the licht), an' as saftly as ever he could, gaed straucht out o' the manse an' to the far end o' the causeway. It was aye pit-mirk; the flame o' the can'le, when he set it on the grund, burnt steedy and clear as in a room; naething moved, but the Dule water seepin' and sabbin' doun the glen, an' yon unhaly footstep that cam' ploddin' doun the stairs inside the manse. He kenned the foot ower weel, for it was Janet's; an' at ilka step that cam' a wee thing nearer, the cauld got deeper in his vitals. He commended his soul to Him that made an' keepit him; "and, O Lord," said he, "give me strength this night to war against the powers of evil."

By this time the foot was comin' through the passage for the door; he could hear a hand skirt alang the wa', as if the fearsome thing was feelin' for its way. The saughs tossed an' maned thegither, a long sigh cam' ower the hills, the flame o' the can'le was blawn aboot; an' there stood the corp of Thrawn Janet, wi' her grogram goun an' her black mutch, wi' the heid aye upon the shouther, an' the girn still upon the face o't—leevin', ye wad hae said—died, as Mr. Soulis weel kenned—upon the threshold o' the manse.

It's a strange thing that the soul of man should be that thirled into his perishable body; but the minister saw that, an' his heart didna break.

She didna stand there lang; she began to move again an' cam' slowly towards Mr. Soulis whaur he stood under the saughs. A' the life o' his body, a' the strength o' his speerit, were glowerin' frae his e'en. It seemed she was gaun to speak, but wanted words, an' made a sign wi' the left hand. There cam' a clap o' wund, like a cat's fuff; oot gaed the can'le, the saughs skreighed like folk; an' Mr. Soulis kenned that, live or die, this was the end o't.

"Witch, beldame, devil!" he cried, "I charge you, by the power of God, begone —if you be dead, to the grave—if you be damned, to hell."

An' at that moment the Lord's ain hand out o' the Heevens struck the Horror whaur it stood; the auld, deid, descrated corp o' the witch-wife, sae lang keepit

frae the grave and hirsled round by de'ils, lowed up like a brunstane spunk an' fell in ashes to the grund; the thunder followed, peal on dirlin' peal, the rarin' rain upon the back o' that; and Mr. Soulis lowped through the garden hedge, an' ran, wi' skelloch upon skelloch, for the clachan.

That same mornin', John Christie saw the Black Man pass the Muckle Cairn as it was chappin' six; before eicht, he gaed by the change-house at Knockdow; an' no' lang after, Sandy M'Lellan saw him gaun linkin' doun the braes frae Kilmackerlie. There's little doubt but it was him that dwalled sae lang in Janet's body; but he was awa' at last; an' sinsyne the de'il has never fashed us in Ba'weary.

But it was a sair dispensation for the minister; lang, lang he lay ravin' in his bed; an' frae that hour to this, he was the man ye ken the day.

Marjorie Bowen

THE AVENGING OF ANN LEETE

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This is a queer story, the more queer for the interpretation of passions of strong human heat that have been put upon it, and for glimpses of other motives and doings, not, it would seem, human at all.

The whole thing is seen vaguely, brokenly, a snatch here and there; one tells the tale, strangely another exclaims amaze, a third points out a scene, a fourth has a dim memory of a circumstance, a nine-days' (or less) wonder, an old print helps, the name on a mural tablet in a deserted church pinches the heart with a sense of confirmation, and so you have your story. When all is said it remains a queer tale.

It is seventy years odd ago, so dating back from this present year of 1845 you come to nearly midway in the last century, when conditions were vastly different from what they are now.

The scene is in Glasgow, and there are three points from which we start, all leading us to the heart of our tale.

The first is the portrait of a woman that hangs in the parlour of a respectable banker. He believes it to be the likeness of some connexion of his wife's dead this many a year, but he does not know much about it. Some while ago it was discovered in a lumber-room, and he keeps it for the pallid beauty of the canvas, which is much faded and rubbed.

Since, as a young man, I first had the privilege of my worthy friend's acquaintance, I have always felt a strange interest in this picture; and, in that peculiar way

that the imagination will seize on trifles, I was always fascinated by the dress of the lady. This is of dark green, very fine silk; an uncommon colour to use in a portrait, and, perhaps, in a lady's dress. It is very plain, with a little scarf of a striped Roman pattern, and her hair is drawn up over a pillow in the antique mode. Her face is expressionless, yet strange, the upper lip very thin, the lower very full, the light brown eyes set under brows that slant. I cannot tell why this picture was always to me full of such a great attraction, but I used to think of it a vast deal, and often to note, secretly, that never had I chanced to meet in real life, or in any other painting, a lady in a dark green silk dress.

In the corner of the canvas is a little device, put in a diamond as a gentlewoman might bear arms, yet with no pretensions to heraldry, just three little birds, the topmost with a flower in its beak.

It was not so long ago that I came upon the second clue that leads into the story, and that was a mural tablet in an old church near the Rutherglen Road, a church that has lately fallen into disrepute or neglect, for it was deserted and impoverished. But I was assured that a generation ago it had been a most famous place of worship, fashionable and well frequented by the better sort.

The mural tablet was to one "Ann Leete," and there was just the date (seventy-odd years old), given with what seemed a sinister brevity.

And underneath the lettering, lightly cut on the time-stained marble, was the same device as that on the portrait of the lady in the green silk dress.

I was curious enough to make enquiries, but no one seemed to know anything of, or wished to talk about, Ann Leete.

It was all so long ago, I was told, and there was no one now in the parish of the name of Leete.

And all who had been acquainted with the family of Leete seemed to be dead or gone away. The parish register (my curiosity went so far as an inspection of this) yielded me no more information than the mural tablet.

I spoke to my friend the banker, and he said he thought that his wife had had some cousins by the name of Leete, and that there was some tale of a scandal or great misfortune attached to them which was the reason of a sort of ban on their name so that it had never been mentioned.

When I told him I thought the portrait of the lady in the dark green silk might picture a certain Ann Leete he appeared uneasy and even desirous of having the likeness removed, which roused in me the suspicion that he knew something of the name, and that not pleasant. But it seemed to me indelicate and perhaps useless to question him.

It was a year or so after this incident that my business, which was that of silversmith and jeweller, put into my hands a third clue. One of my apprentices came to me with a rare piece of work which had been left at the shop for repair.

It was a thin medal of the purest gold, on which was set in fresh water pearls, rubies and cairngorms the device of the three birds, the plumage being most skilfully wrought in the bright jewels and the flower held by the topmost creature accurately designed in pearls.

It was one of these pearls that was missing, and I had some difficulty in matching its soft lustre.

An elderly lady called for the ornament, the same person who had left it. I saw her myself, and ventured to admire and praise the workmanship of the medal.

"Oh," she said, "it was worked by a very famous jeweller, my great-uncle, and he has a peculiar regard for it—indeed I believe it has never before been out of his possession, but he was so greatly grieved by the loss of the pearl that he would not rest until I offered to take it to be repaired. He is, you will understand," she added with a smile, "a very old man. He must have made that jewellery—why—seventy-odd years ago."

Seventy-odd years ago—that would bring one back to the date on the tablet to Ann Leete, to the period of the portrait.

"I have seen this device before," I remarked, "on the likeness of a lady and on the mural inscription in memory of a certain Ann Leete." Again this name appeared to make an unpleasant impression.

My customer took her packet hastily.

"It is associated with something dreadful," she said quickly. "We do not speak of it—a very old story. I did not know anyone had heard of it—"

"I certainly have not," I assured her. "I came to Glasgow not so long ago, as apprentice to this business of my uncle's which now I own."

"But you have seen a portrait?" she asked.

"Yes, in the house of a friend of mine."

"This is queer. We did not know that any existed. Yet my great-uncle does speak of one—in a green silk dress."

"In a green silk dress," I confirmed.

The lady appeared amazed.

"But it is better to let the matter rest," she decided. "My relative, you will realize, is very old—nearly, sir, a hundred years old, and his wits wander and he tells queer tales. It was all very strange and horrible, but one cannot tell how much my old uncle dreams."

"I should not think to disturb him," I replied.

But my customer hesitated.

"If you know of this portrait—perhaps he should be told; he laments after it so much, and we have always believed it an hallucination—"

She returned the packet containing the medal.

"Perhaps," she added dubiously, "you are interested enough to take this back to my relative yourself and judge what you shall or shall not tell him?"

I eagerly accepted the offer, and the lady gave me the name and residence of the old man who, although possessed of considerable means, had lived for the past fifty years in the greatest seclusion in that lonely part of the town beyond the Rutherglen Road and near to the Green, the once pretty and fashionable resort for youth and pleasure, but now a deserted and desolate region. Here, on the first opportunity, I took my way, and found myself well out into the country,

nearly at the river, before I reached the lonely mansion of Eneas Bretton, as the ancient jeweller was called.

A ferocious dog troubled my entrance in the dark, overgrown garden where the black glossy laurels and bays strangled the few flowers, and a grim woman, in an old-fashioned mutch or cap, at length answered my repeated peals at the rusty chain bell.

It was not without considerable trouble that I was admitted into the presence of Mr. Bretton, and only, I think, by the display of the jewel and the refusal to give it into any hands but those of its owner.

The ancient jeweller was seated on a southern terrace that received the faint and fitful rays of the September sun.

He was wrapped in shawls that disguised his natural form, and a fur and leather cap was fastened under his chin.

I had the impression that he had been a fine man, of a vigorous and handsome appearance; even now, in the extreme of decay, he showed a certain grandeur of line and carriage, a certain majestic power in his personality. Though extremely feeble, I did not take him to be imbecile nor greatly wanting in his faculties.

He received me courteously, though obviously ill-used to strangers.

I had, he said, a claim on him as a fellow-craftsman, and he was good enough to commend the fashion in which I had repaired his medal.

This, as soon as he had unwrapped, he fastened to a fine gold chain he drew from his breast, and slipped inside his heavy clothing.

"A pretty trinket," I said, "and of an unusual design."

"I fashioned it myself," he answered, "over seventy years ago. The year before, sir, she died."

"Ann Leete?" I ventured.

The ancient man was not in the least surprised at the use of this name.

"It is a long time since I heard those words with any but my inner ear," he murmured; "to be sure, I grow very old. You'll not remember Ann Leete?" he added wistfully.

"I take it she died before I was born," I answered.

He peered at me.

"Ah, yes, you are still a young man, though your hair is grey."

I noticed now that he wore a small tartan scarf inside his coat and shawl; this fact gave me a peculiar, almost unpleasant shudder.

"I know this about Ann Leete—she had a dark green silk dress. And a Roman or tartan scarf."

He touched the wisp of bright-coloured silk across his chest.

"This is it. She had her likeness taken so—but it was lost."

"It is preserved," I answered. "And I know where it is. I might, if you desired, bring you to a sight of it."

He turned his grand old face to me with a civil inclination of his massive head.

"That would be very courteous of you, sir, and a pleasure to me. You must not think," he added with dignity, "that the lady has forsaken me or that I do not

often see her. Indeed, she comes to me more frequently than before. But it would delight me to have the painting of her to console the hours of her absence."

I reflected what his relative had said about the weakness of his wits, and recalled his great age, which one was apt to forget in face of his composure and reasonableness.

He appeared now to doze and to take no further notice of my presence, so I left him.

He had a strange look of lifelessness as he slumbered there in the faintest rays of the cloudy autumn sun.

I reflected how lightly the spirit must dwell in this ancient frame, how easily it must take flight into the past, how soon into eternity.

It did not cost me much persuasion to induce my friend, the banker, to lend me the portrait of Ann Leete, particularly as the canvas had been again sent up to the attics.

"Do *you* know the story?" I asked him.

He replied that he had heard something; that the case had made a great stir at the time; that it was all very confused and amazing, and that he did not desire to discuss the matter.

I hired a carriage and took the canvas to the house of Eneas Bretton.

He was again on the terrace, enjoying with a sort of calm eagerness the last warmth of the failing sun.

His two servants brought in the picture and placed it on a chair at his side.

He gazed at the painted face with the greatest serenity.

"That is she," he said, "but I am glad to think that she looks happier now, sir. She still wears that dark green silk. I never see her in any other garment."

"A beautiful woman," I remarked quietly, not wishing to agitate or disturb his reflections, which were clearly detached from any considerations of time and space.

"I have always thought so," he answered gently, "but I, sir, have peculiar faculties. I saw her, and see her still as a spirit. I loved her as a spirit. Yet our bodily union was necessary for our complete happiness. And in that my darling and I were balked."

"By death?" I suggested, for I knew that the word had no terrors for him.

"By death," he agreed, "who will soon be forced to unite us again."

"But not in the body," I said.

"How, sir, do you know that?" he smiled. "We have but finite minds. I think we have but little conception of the marvellous future."

"Tell me," I urged, "how you lost Ann Leete."

His dim, heavy-lidded, many-wrinkled eyes flickered a glance over me.

"She was murdered," he said.

I could not forbear a shudder.

"That fragile girl!" I exclaimed. My blood had always run cold and thin, and I detested deeds of violence; my even mind could not grasp the idea of the murder of women save as a monstrous enormity.

I looked at the portrait, and it seemed to me that I had always known that it was the likeness of a creature doomed.

"Seventy years ago and more," continued Eneas Bretton, "since when *she has wandered lonely betwixt time and eternity*, waiting for me. But very soon I shall join her, and then, sir, we shall go where there is no recollection of the evil things of this earth."

By degrees he told me the story, not in any clear sequence, nor at any one time, nor without intervals of sleep and pauses of dreaming, nor without assistance from his servants and his great-niece and her husband, who were his frequent visitors.

Yet it was from his own lips and when we were alone together that I learned all that was really vital in the tale.

He required very frequent attendance; although all human passion was at the utmost ebb with him, he had, he said, a kind of regard for me in that I had brought him his lady's portrait, and he told me things of which he had never spoken to any human being before. I say human on purpose because of his intense belief that he was, and always had been, in communication with powers not of this earth.

In these words I put together his tale.

As a young man [said Eneas Bretton] I was healthy, prosperous and happy.

My family had been goldsmiths as long as there was any record of their existence, and I was an enthusiast in this craft, grave, withal, and studious, over-fond of books and meditation. I do not know how or when I first met Ann Leete.

To me she was always there like the sun; I think I have known her all my life, but perhaps my memory fails.

Her father was a lawyer and she an only child, and though her social station was considered superior to mine, I had far more in the way of worldly goods, so there was no earthly obstacle to our union.

The powers of evil, however, fought against us; I had feared this from the first, as our happiness was the complete circle ever hateful to fiends and devils who try to break the mystic symbol.

The mistress of my soul attracted the lustful attention of a young doctor, Rob Patterson, who had a certain false charm of person, not real comeliness, but a trick of colour, of carriage and a fine taste in clothes.

His admiration was whetted by her coldness and his intense dislike of me.

We came to scenes in which he derided me as no gentleman, but a beggarly tradesman, and I scorned him as an idle voluptuary designing a woman's ruin for the crude pleasure of the gratification of fleeting passions.

For the fellow made not even any pretence of being able to support a wife, and was of that rake-helly temperament that made an open mock of matrimony.

Although he was but a medical student, he was of what they call noble birth, and his family, though decayed, possessed considerable social power, so that his bold pursuit of Ann Leete and his insolent flaunting of me had some licence, the more so that he did not lack tact and address in his manner and conduct.

Our marriage could have stopped this persecution, or given the right to publicly resent it, but my darling would not leave her father, who was of a melancholy and querulous disposition.

It was shortly before her twenty-first birthday, for which I had made her the jewel I now wear (the device being the crest of her mother's family and one for which she had a great affection), that her father died suddenly. His last thoughts were of her, for he had this very picture painted for her birthday gift. Finding herself thus unprotected and her affairs in some confusion, she declared her intention of retiring to some distant relative in the Highlands until decorum permitted of our marriage.

And upon my opposing myself to this scheme of separation and delay she was pleased to fall out with me, declaring that I was as importunate as Dr. Patterson, and that I, as well as he, should be kept in ignorance of her retreat.

I had, however, great hopes of inducing her to change this resolution, and, it being then fair spring weather, engaged her to walk with me on the Green, beyond the city, to discuss our future.

I was an orphan like herself, and we had now no common meeting-place suitable to her reputation and my respect.

By reason of a pressure of work, to which by temperament and training I was ever attentive, I was a few moments late at the tryst on the Green, which I found, as usual, empty; but it was a lovely afternoon of May, very still and serene, like the smile of satisfied love.

I paced about, looking for my darling.

Although she was in mourning, she had promised me to wear the dark green silk I so admired under her black cloak, and I looked for this colour among the brighter greens of the trees and bushes.

She did not appear, and my heart was chilled with the fear that she was offended with me and therefore would not come, and an even deeper dread that she might, in vexation, have fled to her unknown retreat.

This thought was sending me hot-foot to seek her at her house, when I saw Rob Patterson coming across the close-shaven grass of the Green.

I remember that the cheerful sun seemed to me to be at this moment darkened, not by any natural clouds or mists, but as it is during an eclipse, and that the fresh trees and innocent flowers took on a ghastly and withered look.

It may appear a trivial detail, but I recall so clearly his habit, which was of a luxury beyond his means—fine grey broadcloth with a deep edging of embroidery in gold thread, little suited to his profession.

As he saw me he cocked his hat over his eyes, but took no other notice of my appearance, and I turned away, not being wishful of any encounter with this gentleman while my spirit was in a tumult.

I went at once to my darling's house, and learnt from her maid that she had left home two hours previously.

I do not wish to dwell on this part of my tale—indeed, I could not, it becomes very confused to me.

The salient facts are these—that no one saw Ann Leete in bodily form again.

And no one could account for her disappearance; yet no great comment was aroused by this, because there was no one to take much interest in her, and it was commonly believed that she had disappeared from the importunity of her lovers, the more so as Rob Patterson swore that the day of her disappearance he had had an interview with her in which she had avowed her intention of going where no one could discover her. This, in a fashion, was confirmed by what she had told me, and I was the more inclined to believe it, as my inner senses told me that she was not dead.

Six months of bitter search, of sad uneasiness, that remain in my memory blurred to one pain, and then, one autumn evening, as I came home late and dispirited, I saw her before me in the gloaming, tripping up the street, wearing her dark green silk dress and tartan or Roman scarf.

I did not see her face as she disappeared before I could gain on her, but she held to her side one hand, and between the long fingers I saw the haft of a surgeon's knife.

I knew then that she was dead.

And I knew that Rob Patterson had killed her.

Although it was well known that my family were all ghostseers, to speak in this case was to be laughed at and reprimanded.

I had no single shread of evidence against Dr. Patterson.

But I resolved that I would use what powers I possessed to make him disclose his crime.

And this is how it befell.

In those days, in Glasgow, it was compulsory to attend some place of worship on the Sabbath, the observation of the holy day being enforced with peculiar strictness, and none being allowed to show themselves in any public place during the hours of the church services, and to this end inspectors and overseers were employed to patrol the streets on a Sabbath and take down the names of those who might be found loitering there.

But few were the defaulters, Glasgow on a Sunday being as bare as the Arabian desert.

Rob Patterson and I both attended the church in Rutherglen Road, towards the Green and the river.

And the Sunday after I had seen the phantom of Ann Leete, I changed my usual place and seated myself behind this young man.

My intention was to so work on his spirit as to cause him to make public confession of his crime. And I crouched there behind him with a concentration of hate and fury, forcing my will on his during the whole of the long service.

I noticed he was pale, and that he glanced several times behind him, but he did not change his place or open his lips; but presently his head fell forward on his arms as if he was praying, and I took him to be in a kind of swoon brought on by the resistance of his spirit against mine.

I did not for this cease to pursue him. I was, indeed, as if in an exaltation, and I thought my soul had his soul by the throat, somewhere above our heads, and was shouting out: "Confess! Confess!"

One o'clock struck and he rose with the rest of the congregation, but in a dazed kind of fashion. It was almost side by side that we issued from the church door.

As the stream of people came into the street they were stopped by a little procession that came down the road.

All immediately recognized two of the inspectors employed to search the Sunday streets for defaulters from church attendance, followed by several citizens who appeared to have left their homes in haste and confusion.

These people carried between them a rude bundle which some compassionate hand had covered with a white linen cloth. Below this fell a swathe of dark green silk and the end of a Roman scarf.

I stepped up to the rough bier.

"You have found Ann Leete," I said.

"It is a dead woman," one answered me. "We know not her name."

I did not need to raise the cloth. The congregation was gathering round us, and amongst them was Rob Patterson.

"Tell me, who was her promised husband, how you found her," I said.

And one of the inspectors answered:

"Near here, on the Green, where the wall bounds the grass, we saw, just now, the young surgeon, Rob Patterson, lying on the sward, and put his name in our books, besides approaching him to enquire the reason of his absence from church. But he, without excuse for his offence, rose from the ground, exclaiming: 'I am a miserable man! Look in the water!'

"With that he crossed a stile that leads to the river and disappeared, and we, going down to the water, found the dead woman, deep tangled between the willows and the weeds—"

"And," added the other inspector gravely, "tangled in her clothes is a surgeon's knife."

"Which," said the former speaker, "perhaps Dr. Patterson can explain, since I perceive he is among this congregation—he must have found some quick way round to have got here before us."

Upon this all eyes turned on the surgeon, but more with amaze than reproach.

And he, with a confident air, said:

"It is known to all these good people that I have been in the church the whole of the morning, especially to Eneas Bretton, who sat behind me, and, I dare swear, never took his eyes from me during the whole of the service."

"Ay, your *body* was there," I said.

With that he laughed angrily, and mingling with the crowd passed on his way.

You may believe there was a great stir; the theory put abroad was that Ann Leete had been kept a prisoner in a solitary, ruined hut there was by the river, and then, fury or fear, slain by her jailer and cast into the river.

To me all this is black. I only know that she was murdered by Rob Patterson.

He was arrested and tried on the circuit.

He there proved, beyond all cavil, that he had been in the church from the beginning of the service to the end of it; his alibi was perfect. But the two in-

spectors never wavered in their tale of seeing him on the Green, of his self-accusation in his exclamation; he was very well known to them, and they showed his name written in their books.

He was acquitted by the tribunal of man, but a higher power condemned him.

Shortly after he died by his own hand, which God armed and turned against him.

This mystery, as it was called, was never solved to the public satisfaction, but I know that I sent Rob Patterson's soul out of his body to betray his guilt, and to procure my darling Christian burial.

This was the tale Eneas Bretton, that ancient man, told me, on the old terrace, as he sat opposite the picture of Ann Leete.

"You must think what you will," he concluded. "They will tell you that the shock unsettled my wits, or even that I was always crazed. As they would tell you that I dream when I say I see Ann Leete now, and babble when I talk of my happiness with her for fifty years."

He smiled faintly; a deeper glory than that of the autumn sunshine seemed to rest on him.

"Explain it yourself, sir. *What was it those inspectors saw on the Green?*"

He slightly raised himself in his chair and peered over my shoulder.

"*And what is this,*" he asked triumphantly, in the voice of a young man, "*coming towards us now?*"

I rose; I looked over my shoulder.

Through the gloom I saw a dark green silk gown, a woman's form, a pale hand beckoning.

My impulse was to fly from the spot, but a happy sigh from my companion reproved my cowardice. I looked at the ancient man whose whole figure appeared lapped in warm light, and as the apparition of the woman moved into this glow, which seemed too glorious for the fading sunshine, I heard his last breath flow from his body with a glad cry. I had not answered his questions; I never can.

W. F. Harvey

AUGUST HEAT

from Midnight House and Other Tales

Dent, 1910

Permission to reprint is granted by the author

Phenistone Road, Clapham,
August 20th, 190—.

I have had what I believe to be the most remarkable day in my life, and while the events are still fresh in my mind, I wish to put them down on paper as clearly as possible.

Let me say at the outset that my name is James Clarence Withencroft.

I am forty years old, in perfect health, never having known a day's illness.

By profession I am an artist, not a very successful one, but I earn enough money by my black-and-white work to satisfy my necessary wants.

My only near relative, a sister, died five years ago, so that I am independent.

I breakfasted this morning at nine, and after glancing through the morning paper I lighted my pipe and proceeded to let my mind wander in the hope that I might chance upon some subject for my pencil.

The room, though door and windows were open, was oppressively hot, and I had just made up my mind that the coolest and most comfortable place in the neighbourhood would be the deep end of the public swimming bath, when the idea came.

I began to draw. So intent was I on my work that I left my lunch untouched, only stopping work when the clock of St. Jude's struck four.

The final result, for a hurried sketch, was, I felt sure, the best thing I had done.

It showed a criminal in the dock immediately after the judge had pronounced sentence. The man was fat—enormously fat. The flesh hung in rolls about his chin; it creased his huge, stumpy neck. He was clean shaven (perhaps I should say a few days before he must have been clean shaven) and almost bald. He stood in the dock, his short, clumsy fingers clasping the rail, looking straight in front of him. The feeling that his expression conveyed was not so much one of horror as of utter, absolute collapse.

There seemed nothing in the man strong enough to sustain that mountain of flesh.

I rolled up the sketch, and without quite knowing why, placed it in my pocket.

Then with the rare sense of happiness which the knowledge of a good thing well done gives, I left the house.

I believe that I set out with the idea of calling upon Trenton, for I remember walking along Lytton Street and turning to the right along Gilchrist Road at the bottom of the hill where the men were at work on the new tram lines.

From there onwards I have only the vaguest recollection of where I went. The one thing of which I was fully conscious was the awful heat, that came up from the dusty asphalt pavement as an almost palpable wave. I longed for the thunder promised by the great banks of copper-coloured cloud that hung low over the western sky.

I must have walked five or six miles, when a small boy roused me from my reverie by asking the time.

It was twenty minutes to seven.

When he left me I began to take stock of my bearings. I found myself standing before a gate that led into a yard bordered by a strip of thirsty earth, where there were flowers, purple stock and scarlet geranium. Above the entrance was a board with the inscription——

CHS. ATKINSON. MONUMENTAL MASON.

WORKER IN ENGLISH AND ITALIAN MARBLES

From the yard itself came a cheery whistle, the noise of hammer blows, and the cold sound of steel meeting stone.

A sudden impulse made me enter.

A man was sitting with his back towards me, busy at work on a slab of curiously veined marble. He turned round as he heard my steps and I stopped short.

It was the man I had been drawing, whose portrait lay in my pocket.

He sat there, huge and elephantine, the sweat pouring from his scalp, which he wiped with a red silk handkerchief. But though the face was the same, the expression was absolutely different.

He greeted me smiling, as if we were old friends, and shook my hand.

I apologised for my intrusion.

"Everything is hot and glary outside," I said. "This seems an oasis in the wilderness."

"I don't know about the oasis," he replied, "but it certainly is hot, as hot as hell. Take a seat, sir!"

He pointed to the end of the gravestone on which he was at work, and I sat down.

"That's a beautiful piece of stone you've got hold of," I said.

He shook his head. "In a way it is," he answered; "the surface here is as fine as anything you could wish, but there's a big flaw at the back, though I don't expect you'd ever notice it. I could never make really a good job of a bit of marble like that. It would be all right in the summer like this; it wouldn't mind the blasted heat. But wait till the winter comes. There's nothing quite like frost to find out the weak points in stone."

"Then what's it for?" I asked.

The man burst out laughing.

"You'd hardly believe me if I was to tell you it's for an exhibition, but it's the truth. Artists have exhibitions: so do grocers and butchers; we have them too. All the latest little things in headstones, you know."

He went on to talk of marbles, which sort best withstood wind and rain, and which were easiest to work; then of his garden and a new sort of carnation he had bought. At the end of every other minute he would drop his tools, wipe his shining head, and curse the heat.

I said little, for I felt uneasy. There was something unnatural, uncanny, in meeting this man.

I tried at first to persuade myself that I had seen him before, that his face, unknown to me, had found a place in some out-of-the-way corner of my memory, but I knew that I was practising little more than a plausible piece of self-deception.

Mr. Atkinson finished his work, spat on the ground, and got up with a sigh of relief.

"There! what do you think of that?" he said, with an air of evident pride.

The inscription which I read for the first time was this—

SACRED TO THE MEMORY
OF
JAMES CLARENCE WITHENCROFT.
BORN JAN. 18TH, 1860.
HE PASSED AWAY VERY SUDDENLY
ON AUGUST 20TH, 190—
"In the midst of life we are in death."

For some time I sat in silence. Then a cold shudder ran down my spine. I asked him where he had seen the name.

"Oh, I didn't see it anywhere," replied Mr. Atkinson. "I wanted some name, and I put down the first that came into my head. Why do you want to know?"

"It's a strange coincidence, but it happens to be mine."

He gave a long, low whistle.

"And the dates?"

"I can only answer for one of them, and that's correct."

"It's a rum go!" he said.

But he knew less than I did. I told him of my morning's work. I took the sketch from my pocket and showed it to him. As he looked, the expression of his face altered until it became more and more like that of the man I had drawn.

"And it was only the day before yesterday," he said, "that I told Maria there were no such things as ghosts!"

Neither of us had seen a ghost, but I knew what he meant.

"You probably heard my name," I said.

"And you must have seen me somewhere and have forgotten it! Were you at Clacton-on-Sea last July?"

I had never been to Clacton in my life. We were silent for some time. We were both looking at the same thing, the two dates on the gravestone, and one was right.

"Come inside and have some supper," said Mr. Atkinson.

His wife was a cheerful little woman, with the flaky red cheeks of the country-bred. Her husband introduced me as a friend of his who was an artist. The result was unfortunate, for after the sardines and watercress had been removed, she brought out a Doré Bible, and I had to sit and express my admiration for nearly half an hour.

I went outside, and found Atkinson sitting on the gravestone smoking.

We resumed the conversation at the point we had left off.

"You must excuse my asking," I said, "but do you know of anything you've done for which you could be put on trial?"

He shook his head.

"I'm not a bankrupt, the business is prosperous enough. Three years ago I gave turkeys to some of the guardians at Christmas, but that's all I can think of. And they were small ones, too," he added as an afterthought.

He got up, fetched a can from the porch, and began to water the flowers. "Twice a day regular in the hot weather," he said, "and then the heat sometimes gets the better of the delicate ones. And ferns, good Lord! they could never stand it. Where do you live?"

I told him my address. It would take an hour's quick walk to get back home.

"It's like this," he said. "We'll look at the matter straight. If you go back home to-night, you take your chance of accidents. A cart may run over you, and there's always banana skins and orange peel, to say nothing of fallen ladders."

He spoke of the improbable with an intense seriousness that would have been laughable six hours before. But I did not laugh.

"The best thing we can do," he continued, "is for you to stay here till twelve o'clock. We'll go upstairs and smoke; it may be cooler inside."

To my surprise I agreed.

. . . . . .

We are sitting now in a long, low room beneath the eaves. Atkinson has sent his wife to bed. He himself is busy sharpening some tools at a little oilstone, smoking one of my cigars the while.

The air seems charged with thunder. I am writing this at a shaky table before the open window. The leg is cracked, and Atkinson, who seems a handy man with his tools, is going to mend it as soon as he has finished putting an edge on his chisel.

It is after eleven now. I shall be gone in less than an hour.

But the heat is stifling.

It is enough to send a man mad.

Morley Roberts

THE ANTICIPATOR

from The Grinder's Wheel

Nelson, 1907

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A. P. Watt & Son

"Of course, I admit it isn't plagiarism," said Carter Esplan, savagely; "it's fate, it's the devil, but is it the less irritating on that account? No, no!"

And he ran his hand through his hair till it stood on end. He shook with febrile excitement, a red spot burned on either cheek, and his bitten lip quivered.

"Confound Burford and his parents and his ancestors! The tools to him that can handle them," he added after a pause, during which his friend Vincent curiously considered him.

"It's your own fault, my dear wild man," said he; "you are too lazy. Besides, remember these things—these notions, motives—are in the air. Originality is only the art of catching early worms. Why don't you do the things as soon as you invent them?"

"Now you talk like a bourgeois, like a commercial traveller," returned Esplan, angrily. "Why doesn't an apple-tree yield apples when the blossoms are fertilized? Why wait for summer, and the influences of wind and sky? Why don't live chickens burst new-laid eggs? Shall parturition tread sudden on conception? Didn't the mountain labour to bring forth a mouse? And shall—"

"Your works of genius do not require a portion of the eternity to which they are destined?"

"Stuff!" snarled Esplan; "but you know my method. I catch the suggestion, the floating thistledown of thought, the title, maybe; and then I leave it, perhaps without a note, to the brain, to the subliminal consciousness, the sub-conscious self. The story grows in the dark of the inner, perpetual, sleepless soul. It may be rejected by the artistic tribunal sitting there; it may be bidden to stand aside. I, the outer I, the husk-case of heredities, know nothing of it, but one day I take the pen and the hand writes it. This is the automatism of art, and I—I am nothing, the last only of the concealed individualities within me. Perhaps a dumb ancestor attains speech, and yet the Complex Ego Esplan must be anticipated in this way!"

He rose and paced the lonely club-smoking-room with irregular steps. His nerves were evidently quivering, his brain was wild. But Vincent, who was a

physician, saw deeper. For Esplan's speech was jerky, at times he missed the right word; the speech centres were not under control.

"What of morphine?" he thought. "I wonder if he's at it again, and is to-day without his quantum." But Esplan burst out once more.

"I should not care so much if Burford did them well, but he doesn't know how to write a story. Look at this last thing of mine—of his. I saw it leaping and alive; it rang and sang, a very Maenad; it had red blood. With him it wasn't even born dead; it squeaks puppetry, and leaks sawdust, and moves like a lay figure, and smells of most manifest manufacture. But I can't do it now. He has spoilt it for ever. It's the third time. Curse him, and my luck! I work when I must."

"Your calling is very serious to you," said Vincent, lazily. "After all, what does it matter? What are stories? Are they not opiates for cowards' lives? I would rather invent some little instrument, or build a plank bridge across a muddy stream, than write the best of them."

Esplan turned on him.

"Well, well," he almost shouted; "the man who invented chloroform was great, and the makers of it are useful. Call stories chloral, morphia, bromides, if you will, but we give ease."

"When it might be better to use blisters."

"Rot!" answered Esplan, rudely. "In any case, your talk is idle. I am I, writers are writers—small, if you will, but a result and a force. Give me a rest. Don't talk ideal poppycock!"

He ordered liqueur brandy. After drinking it his aspect changed a little, and he smiled.

"Perhaps it won't occur again. If it does, I shall feel that Burford is very much in my way. I shall have to—"

"Remove him?" asked Vincent.

"No, but work quicker. I have something to write soon. It would just suit him to spoil."

The talk changed, and soon afterwards the friends parted. Esplan went to his chambers in Bloomsbury. He paced his sitting-room idly for a few minutes, but after a while he began to feel the impulse in his brain; his fingers itched, the semi-automatic mood came on. He sat down and wrote, at first slowly, then quicker, and at last furiously.

It was three in the afternoon when he commenced work. At ten o'clock he was still at his desk, and the big table on which it stood was strewn with tobacco-ashes and many pipes. His hair again stood on end, for at intervals he ran his damp hands through it. His eyes altered like opals; at times they sparkled and almost blazed, and then grew dim. He changed at each sentence; he mouthed his written talk audibly; each thought was reflected in his pale mobile face. He laughed and then groaned; at the crisis, tears ran down and blurred the already undecipherable script. But at eleven he rose, stiff in every limb, and staggering. With difficulty he picked the unpaged leaves from the floor, and sorted them in due order. He fell into his chair.

"It's good, it's good!" he said, chuckling; "what a queer devil I am! My dumb

ancestors pipe oddly in me. It's strange, devilish strange; man's but a mouthpiece, and crazy at that. How long has this last thing been hatching? The story is old, yet new. Gibbon shall have it. It will just suit him. Little beast, little horror, little hog, with a divine gold ring of appreciation in his grubbing snout."

He drank half a tumbler of whisky, and tumbled into bed. His mind ran riot.

"My ego's a bit fissured," he said. "I ought to be careful."

And ere he fell asleep he talked conscious nonsense. Incongruous ideas linked themselves together; he sneered at his brain's folly, and yet he was afraid. He used morphine at last in such a big dose that it touched the optic centre and subjective lightnings flashed in his dark room. He dreamed of an "At Home," where he met big, brutal Burford wearing a great diamond in his shirt-front.

"Bought by my conveyed thoughts," he said. But looking down he perceived that he had yet a greater jewel of his own, and soon his soul melted in the contemplation of its rays, till his consciousness was dissipated by a divine absorption into the very Nirvana of Light.

When he woke the next day, it was already late in the afternoon. He was overcome by yesterday's labour, and, though much less irritable, he walked feebly. The trouble of posting his story to Gibbon seemed almost too much for him; but he sent it, and took a cab to his club, where he sat almost comatose for many hours.

Two days afterwards he received a note from the editor, returning his story. It was good, but——

"Burford sent me a tale with the same motive weeks ago, and I accepted it."

Esplan smashed his thin white hand on his mantelpiece, and made it bleed. That night he got drunk on champagne, and the brilliant wine seemed to nip and bite and twist every nerve and brain cell. His irritability grew so extreme that he lay in wait for subtle, unconceived insults, and meditated morbidly on the aspect of innocent strangers. He gave the waiter double what was necessary, not because it was particularly deserved, but because he felt that the slightest sign of discontent on the man's part might lead to an uncontrollable outburst of anger on his own.

Next day, he met Burford in Piccadilly, and cut him dead with a bitter sneer.

"I daren't speak to him—I daren't!" he muttered.

And Burford, who could not quite understand, felt outraged. He himself hated Esplan with the hatred of an outpaced, outsailed rival. He knew his own work lacked the diabolical certainty of Esplan's—it wanted the fine phrase, the right red word of colour, the rush and onward march to due finality, the bitter, exact conviction, the knowledge of humanity that lies in inheritance, the exalted experience that proves received intuitions. He was, he knew, a successful failure, and his ambition was greater even than Esplan's. For he was greedy, grasping, esurient, and his hollowness was obvious even before Esplan proved it with his ringing touch.

"He takes what I have done, and does it better. It's malice, malice," he urged to himself.

And when Esplan placed his last story, and the world remembered, only to

forget in its white-hot brilliance, the cold paste of Burford's Paris jewel, he felt hell surge within him. But he beat his thoughts down for a while, and went on his little, laboured way.

The success of the story and Burford's bitter eclipse helped Esplan greatly, and he might have got saner if other influences working for misery in his life had not hurt him. For a certain woman died, one whom none knew to be his friend, and he clung to morphine, which, in its increase, helped to throw him later.

And at last the crash did come, for Burford had two stories, better far than his usual work, in a magazine that Esplan looked on as his own. They were on Esplan's very motives; he had them almost ready to write. The sting of this last bitter blow drove him off his tottering balance; he conceived murder, and plotted it brutally, and then subtly, and became dominated by it, till his life was the flower of the insane motive. It altered nothing that a reviewer pointed out the close resemblance between the two men's work, and, exalting Esplan's genius, placed one writer beyond all cavil, the other below all place.

But that drove Burford crazy. It was so bitterly true. He ground his teeth, and hating his own work, hated worse the man who destroyed his own conceit. He wanted to do harm. How should he do it?

Esplan had long since gone under. He was a homicidal maniac, with one man before him. He conceived and wrote schemes. His stories ran to murder. He read and imagined means. At times he was in danger of believing he had already done the deed. One wild day he almost gave himself up for this proleptic death. Thus his imagination burnt and flamed before his conceived path.

"I'll do it, I'll do it," he muttered; and at the club the men talked about him.

"To-morrow," he said, and then he put it off. He must consider the art of it. He left it to bourgeon in his fertile brain. And at last, just as he wrote, action, lighted up by strange circumstances, began to loom big before him. Such a murder would wake a vivid world, and be an epoch in crime. If the red earth were convulsed in war, even then would it stay to hear that incredible, true story, and, soliciting deeper knowledge, seek out the method and growth of means and motive. He chuckled audibly in the street, and laughed thin laughter in his room of fleeting visions. At night he walked the lonely streets near at hand, considering eagerly the rush of his own divided thoughts, and leaning against the railings of the leafy gardens, he saw ghosts in the moon shadows and beckoned them to converse. He became a nightbird and was rarely seen.

"To-morrow," he said at last. To-morrow he would really take the first step. He rubbed his hands and laughed as he pondered near home, in his own lonely square, the finer last details which his imagination multiplied.

"Stay, enough, enough!" he cried to his separate mad mind; "it is already done."

And the shadows were very dark about him. He turned to go home.

Then came immortality to him in strange shape. For it seemed as though his ardent and confined soul burst out of his narrow brain and sparkled marvellously. Lights showered about him, and from a rose sky lightnings flashed, and he heard

awful thunder. The heavens opened in a white blaze, and he saw unimaginable things. He reeled, put his hand to his stricken head, and fell heavily in a pool of his own blood.

And the Anticipator, horribly afraid, ran down a by-street.

Joseph Conrad

THE BRUTE

from A Set of Six

Doubleday, Page & Company

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Dodging in from the rain-swept street, I exchanged a smile and a glance with Miss Blank in the bar of the Three Crows. This exchange was effected with extreme propriety. It is a shock to think that, if still alive, Miss Blank must be something over sixty now. How time passes!

Noticing my gaze directed enquiringly at the partition of glass and varnished wood, Miss Blank was good enough to say, encouragingly:

"Only Mr. Jermyn and Mr. Stonor in the parlour, with another gentleman I've never seen before."

I moved towards the parlour door. A voice discoursing on the other side (it was but a matchboard partition) rose so loudly that the concluding words became quite plain in all their atrocity:

"That fellow Wilmot fairly dashed her brains out, and a good job too!"

This inhuman sentiment, since there was nothing profane or improper in it, failed to do as much as to check the slight yawn Miss Blank was achieving behind her hand. And she remained gazing fixedly at the window-panes, which streamed with rain.

As I opened the parlour door the same voice went on in the same cruel strain:

"I was glad when I heard she got the knock from somebody at last. Sorry enough for poor Wilmot, though. That man and I used to be chums at one time. Of course that was the end of him. A clear case if there ever was one. No way out of it. None at all."

The voice belonged to the gentleman Miss Blank had never seen before. He straddled his long legs on the hearthrug. Jermyn, leaning forward, held his pocket-handkerchief spread out before the grate. He looked back dismally over his shoulder, and as I slipped behind one of the little wooden tables, I nodded to him. On the other side of the fire, imposingly calm and large, sat Mr. Stonor, jammed tight into a capacious Windsor armchair. There was nothing small about him but his short, white side-whiskers. Yards and yards of extra superfine

blue cloth (made up into an overcoat) reposed on a chair by his side. And he must just have brought some liner from sea, because another chair was smothered under his black waterproof, ample as a pall, and made of three-fold oiled silk, double-stitched throughout. A man's handbag of the usual size looked like a child's toy on the floor near his feet.

I did not nod to him. He was too big to be nodded to in that parlour. He was a senior Trinity pilot and condescended to take his turn in the cutter only during the summer months. He had been many times in charge of royal yachts in and out of Port Victoria. Besides, it's no use nodding to a monument. And he was like one. He didn't speak, he didn't budge. He just sat there, holding his handsome old head up, immovable, and almost bigger than life. It was extremely fine. Mr. Stonor's presence reduced old Jermyn to a mere shabby wisp of a man, and made the talkative stranger in tweeds on the hearthrug look absurdly boyish. The latter must have been a few years over thirty, and was certainly not the sort of individual that gets abashed at the sound of his own voice, because gathering me in, as it were, by a friendly glance, he kept it going without a check:

"I was glad of it," he repeated emphatically. "You may be surprised at it, but then you haven't gone through the experience I've had of her. I can tell you, it was something to remember. Of course, I got off scott free myself—as you can see. She did her best to break up my pluck for me tho'. She jolly near drove as fine a fellow as ever lived into a madhouse. What do you say to that—eh?"

Not an eyelid twitched in Mr. Stonor's enormous face. Monumental! The speaker looked straight into my eyes.

"It used to make me sick to think of her going about the world murdering people."

Jermyn approached the handkerchief a little nearer to the grate and groaned. It was simply a habit he had.

"I've seen her once," he declared, with mournful indifference. "She had a house—"

The stranger in tweeds turned to stare down at him surprised.

"She had three houses," he corrected authoritatively. But Jermyn was not to be contradicted.

"She had a house, I say," he repeated, with dismal obstinacy. "A great big, ugly, white thing. You could see it from miles away—sticking up."

"So you could," assented the other readily. "It was old Colchester's notion, though he was always threatening to give her up. He couldn't stand her racket any more, he declared; it was too much of a good thing for him; he would wash his hands of her, if he never got hold of another—and so on. I daresay he would have chucked her, only—it may surprise you—his missus wouldn't hear of it. Funny, eh? But with women, you never know how they will take a thing, and Mrs. Colchester, with her moustaches and big eyebrows, set up for being as strong-minded as they make them. She used to walk about in a brown silk dress, with a great gold cable flopping about her bosom. You should have heard her snapping out: 'Rubbish!' or 'Stuff and nonsense!' I daresay she knew when she

was well off. They had no children, and had never set up a home anywhere. When in England she just made shift to hang out anyhow in some cheap hotel or boarding-house. I daresay she liked to get back to the comforts she was used to. She knew very well she couldn't gain by any change. And, moreover, Colchester, though a first-rate man, was not what you may call in his first youth, and, perhaps, she may have thought that he wouldn't be able to get hold of another (as he used to say) so easily. Anyhow, for one reason or another, it was 'Rubbish' and 'Stuff and nonsense' for the good lady. I overheard once young Mr. Apse himself say to her confidentially: 'I assure you, Mrs. Colchester, I am beginning to feel quite unhappy about the name she's getting for herself.' 'Oh,' says she, with her deep little hoarse laugh, 'if one took notice of all the silly talk,' and she showed Apse all her ugly false teeth at once. 'It would take more than that to make me lose my confidence in her, I assure you,' says she."

At this point, without any change of facial expression, Mr. Stonor emitted a short sardonic laugh. It was very impressive, but I didn't see the fun. I looked from one to another. The stranger on the hearthrug had an ugly smile.

"And Mr. Apse shook both Mrs. Colchester's hands, he was so pleased to hear a good word said for their favourite. All these Apses, young and old you know, were perfectly infatuated with that abominable, dangerous——"

"I beg your pardon," I interrupted, for he seemed to be addressing himself exclusively to me, "but who on earth are you talking about?"

"I am talking of the Apse family," he answered, courteously.

I nearly let out a damn at this. But just then the respected Miss Blank put her head in, and said that the cab was at the door, if Mr. Stonor wanted to catch the eleven-three up.

At once the senior pilot arose in his mighty bulk and began to struggle into his coat, with awe-inspiring upheavals. The stranger and I hurried impulsively to his assistance, and directly we laid our hands on him he became perfectly quiescent. We had to raise our arms very high, and to make efforts. It was like caparisoning a docile elephant. With a "Thanks, gentlemen," he dived under and squeezed himself through the door in a great hurry.

We smiled at each other in a friendly way.

"I wonder how he manages to hoist himself up a ship's side-ladder," said the man in tweeds; and poor Jermyn, who was a mere North Sea pilot, without official status or recognition of any sort, pilot only by courtesy, groaned.

"He makes eight hundred a year."

"Are you a sailor?" I asked the stranger, who had gone back to his position on the rug.

"I used to be till a couple of years ago when I got married," answered this communicative individual. "I even went to sea first in that very ship we were speaking of when you came in."

"What ship?" I asked, puzzled. "I never heard you mention a ship."

"I've just told you her name, my dear sir," he replied. "The *Apse Family*. Surely you've heard of the great firm of Apse & Sons, shipowners. They had a pretty big fleet. There was the *Lucy Apse*, and the *Harold Apse*, and *Anne*,

John, Malcolm, Clara, Juliet, and so on—no end of *Apses*. Every brother, sister, aunt, cousin, wife—and grandmother too, for all I know—of the firm had a ship named after them. Good, solid, old-fashioned craft they were too, built to carry and to last. None of your new-fangled, labour-saving appliances in them, but plenty of men and plenty of good salt beef and hard tack put aboard—and off you go to fight your way out and home again."

The miserable Jermyn made a sound of approval, which sounded like a groan of pain. Those were the ships for him. He pointed out in doleful tones that you couldn't say to labour-saving appliances: "Jump lively now, my hearties." No labour-saving appliance would go aloft on a dirty night with the sands under your lee.

"No," assented the stranger, with a wink at me. "The Apses didn't believe in them either, apparently. They treated their people well—as people don't get treated nowadays, and they were awfully proud of their ships. Nothing ever happened to them. This last one, the *Apse Family*, was to be like the others, only she was to be still stronger, still safer, still more roomy and comfortable. I believe they meant her to last for ever. They had her built composite—iron, teak-wood, and greenheart, and her scantling was something fabulous. If ever an order was given for a ship in a spirit of pride this one was. Everything of the best. The commodore captain of the employ was to command her, and they planned the accommodation for him like a house on shore under a big, tall poop that went nearly to the mainmast. No wonder Mrs. Colchester wouldn't let the old man give her up. Why, it was the best home she ever had in all her married days. She had a nerve, that woman.

"The fuss that was made while that ship was building! Let's have this a little stronger, and that a little heavier; and hadn't that other thing better be changed for something a little thicker. The builders entered into the spirit of the game, and there she was, growing into the clumsiest, heaviest ship of her size right before all their eyes, without anybody becoming aware of it somehow. She was to be 2,000 tons register, or a little over; no less on any account. But see what happens. When they came to measure her she turned out 1,999 tons and a fraction. General consternation! And they say old Mr. Apse was so annoyed, when they told him, that he took to his bed and died. The old gentleman had retired from the firm twenty-five years before, and was ninety-six years old if a day, so his death wasn't, perhaps, so surprising. Still Mr. Lucian Apse was convinced that his father would have lived to a hundred. So we may put him at the head of the list. Next comes the poor devil of a shipwright that brute caught and squashed as she went off the ways. They called it the launch of a ship, but I've heard people say that, from the wailing and yelling and scrambling out of the way, it was more like letting a devil loose upon the river. She snapped all her checks like pack-threads, and went for the tugs in attendance like a fury. Before anybody could see what she was up to she sent one of them to the bottom, and laid up another for three months' repairs. One of her cables parted, and then, suddenly—you couldn't tell why—she let herself be brought up with the other as quiet as a lamb.

"That's how she was. You could never be sure what she would be up to next. There are ships difficult to handle, but generally you can depend on them behaving rationally. With *that* ship, whatever you did with her, you never knew how it would end. She was a wicked beast. Or, perhaps, she was only just insane."

He uttered this supposition in so earnest a tone that I could not refrain from smiling. He left off biting his lower lip to apostrophize me.

"Eh! Why not? Why couldn't there be something in her build, in her lines corresponding to—What's madness? Only something just a tiny bit wrong in the make of your brain. Why shouldn't there be a mad ship—I mean mad in a ship-like way, so that under no circumstances could you be sure she would do what any other sensible ship would naturally do for you. There are ships that steer wildly, and ships that can't be quite trusted always to stay; others want careful watching when running in a gale; and, again, there may be a ship that will make heavy weather of it in every little blow. But then you expect her to be always so. You take it as part of her character, as a ship, just as you take account of a man's peculiarities of temper when you deal with him. But with her you couldn't. She was unaccountable. If she wasn't mad, then she was the most evil-minded, underhand, savage brute that ever went afloat. I've seen her run in a heavy gale beautifully for two days, and on the third broach to twice in the same afternoon. The first time she flung the helmsman clean over the wheel, but as she didn't quite manage to kill him she had another try about three hours afterwards. She swamped herself fore and aft, burst all the canvas we had set, scared all hands into a panic, and even frightened Mrs. Colchester down there in these beautiful stern cabins that she was so proud of. When we mustered the crew there was one man missing. Swept overboard, of course, without being either seen or heard, poor devil! and I only wonder more of us didn't go.

"Always something like that. Always. I heard an old mate tell Captain Colchester once that it had come to this with him, that he was afraid to open his mouth to give any sort of order. She was as much of a terror in harbour as at sea. You could never be certain what would hold her. On the slightest provocation she would start snapping ropes, cables, wire hawsers, like carrots. She was heavy, clumsy, unhandy—but that does not quite explain that power for mischief she had. You know, somehow, when I think of her I can't help remembering what we hear of incurable lunatics breaking loose now and then."

He looked at me inquisitively. But, of course, I couldn't admit that a ship could be mad.

"In the ports where she was known," he went on, "they dreaded the sight of her. She thought nothing of knocking away twenty feet or so of solid stone facing off a quay or wiping off the end of a wooden wharf. She must have lost miles of chain and hundreds of tons of anchors in her time. When she fell aboard some poor offending ship it was the very devil of a job to haul her off again. And she never got hurt herself—just a few scratches or so, perhaps. They had wanted to have her strong. And so she was. Strong enough to ram Polar ice with. And as she began so she went on. From the day she was launched she

never let a year pass without murdering somebody. I think the owners got very worried about it. But they were a stiff-necked generation all these Apses; they wouldn't admit there could be anything wrong with the *Apse Family*. They wouldn't even change her name. 'Stuff and nonsense,' as Mrs. Colchester used to say. They ought at least to have shut her up for life in some dry dock or other, away up the river, and never let her smell salt water again. I assure you, my dear sir, that she invariably did kill some one every voyage she made. It was perfectly well known. She got a name for it, far and wide."

I expressed my surprise that a ship with such a deadly reputation could ever get a crew.

"Then, you don't know what sailors are, my dear sir. Let me just show you by an instance. One day in dock at home, while loafing on the forecastle head, I noticed two respectable salts come along, one a middle-aged, competent, steady man, evidently, the other a smart, youngish chap. They read the name on the bows and stopped to look at her. Says the elder man: '*Apse Family*. That's the sanguinary female dog' (I'm putting it in that way) 'of a ship, Jack, that kills a man every voyage. I wouldn't sign in her—not for Joe, I wouldn't.' And the other says: 'If she were mine, I'd have her towed on the mud and set on fire, blamme if I wouldn't.' Then the first man chimes in: 'Much do they care! Men are cheap, God knows.' The younger one spat in the water alongside. 'They won't have me—not for double wages.'

"They hung about for some time and then walked up the dock. Half an hour later I saw them both on our deck looking about for the mate, and apparently very anxious to be taken on. And they were."

"How do you account for this?" I asked.

"What would you say?" he retorted. "Recklessness! The vanity of boasting in the evening to all their chums: 'We've just shipped in that there *Apse Family*. Blow her. She ain't going to scare us.' Sheer sailor-like perversity! A sort of curiosity. Well—a little of all that, no doubt. I put the question to them in the course of the voyage. The answer of the elderly chap was:

" 'A man can die but once.' The younger assured me in a mocking tone that he wanted to see 'how she would do it this time.' But I tell you what; there was a sort of fascination about the brute."

Jermyn, who seemed to have seen every ship in the world, broke in sulkily:

"I saw her once out of this very window towing up the river; a great black ugly thing, going along like a big hearse."

"Something sinister about her looks, wasn't there?" said the man in tweeds, looking down at old Jermyn with a friendly eye. "I always had a sort of horror of her. She gave me a beastly shock when I was no more than fourteen, the very first day—nay, hour—I joined her. Father came up to see me off, and was to go down to Gravesend with us. I was his second boy to go to sea. My big brother was already an officer then. We got on board about eleven in the morning, and found the ship ready to drop out of the basin, stern first. She had not moved three times her own length when, at a little pluck the tug gave her to enter the dock gates, she made one of her rampaging starts, and put such a weight on

the check rope—a new six-inch hawser—that forward there they had no chance to ease it round in time, and it parted. I saw the broken end fly up high in the air, and the next moment that brute brought her quarter against the pier-head with a jar that staggered everybody about her decks. She didn't hurt herself. Not she! But one of the boys the mate had sent aloft on the mizzen to do something, came down on the poop-deck—thump—right in front of me. He was not much older than myself. We had been grinning at each other only a few minutes before. He must have been handling himself carelessly, not expecting to get such a jerk. I heard his startled cry—Oh!—in a high treble as he felt himself going, and looked up in time to see him go limp all over as he fell. Ough! Poor father was remarkably white about the gills when we shook hands in Gravesend. 'Are you all right?' he says, looking hard at me. 'Yes, father.' 'Quite sure?' 'Yes, father.' 'Well, then, good-bye, my boy.' He told me afterwards that for half a word he would have carried me off home with him there and then. I am the baby of the family—you know," added the man in tweeds, stroking his moustache with an ingenuous smile.

I acknowledged this interesting communication by a sympathetic murmur. He waved his hand carelessly.

"This might have utterly spoiled a chap's nerve for going aloft, you know—utterly. He fell within two feet of me, cracking his head on a mooring-bitt. Never moved. Stone dead. Nice looking little fellow, he was. I had just been thinking we would be great chums. However, that wasn't yet the worst that brute of a ship could do. I served in her three years of my time, and then I got transferred to the *Lucy Apse*, for a year. The sailmaker we had in the *Apse Family* turned up there, too, and I remember him saying to me one evening, after we had been a week at sea: 'Isn't she a meek little ship?' No wonder we thought the *Lucy Apse* a dear, meek, little ship after getting clear of that big rampaging savage brute. It was like heaven. Her officers seemed to me the restfullest lot of men on earth. To me who had known no ship but the *Apse Family*, the *Lucy* was like a sort of magic craft that did what you wanted her to do of her own accord. One evening we got caught aback pretty sharply from right ahead. In about ten minutes we had her full again, sheets aft, tacks down, decks cleared, and the officer of the watch leaning against the weather rail peacefully. It seemed simply marvellous to me. The other would have stuck for half-an-hour in irons, rolling her decks full of water, knocking the men about—spars cracking, braces snapping, yards taking charge, and a confounded scare going on after because of her beastly rudder, which she had a way of flapping about fit to raise your hair on end. I couldn't get over my wonder for days.

"Well, I finished my last year of apprenticeship in that jolly little ship—she wasn't so little either, but after that other heavy devil she seemed but a plaything to handle. I finished my time and passed; and then just as I was thinking of having three weeks of real good time on shore I got at breakfast a letter asking me the earliest day I could be ready to join the *Apse Family* as third mate. I gave my plate a shove that shot it into the middle of the table; dad looked up

over his paper; mother raised her hands in astonishment, and I went out bare-headed into our bit of garden, where I walked round and round for an hour.

"When I came in again mother was out of the dining-room, and dad had shifted berth into his big armchair. The letter was lying on the mantelpiece.

" 'It's very creditable to you to get the offer, and very kind of them to make it,' he said. 'And I see also that Charles has been appointed chief mate of that ship for one voyage.'

"There was overleaf a PS. to that effect in Mr. Apse's own handwriting, which I had overlooked. Charley was my big brother.

" 'I don't like very much to have two of my boys together in one ship,' father goes on, in his deliberate solemn way. 'And I may tell you that I would not mind writing Mr. Apse a letter to that effect.'

"Dear old dad! He was a wonderful father. What would you have done? The mere notion of going back (and as an officer, too), to be worried and bothered, and kept on the jump night and day by that brute, made me feel sick. But she wasn't a ship you could afford to fight shy of. Besides, the most genuine excuse could not be given without mortally offending Apse & Sons. The firm, and I believe the whole family down to the old unmarried aunts in Lancashire, had grown desperately touchy about that accursed ship's character. This was the case for answering 'Ready now' from your very death-bed if you wished to die in their good grace. And that's precisely what I did answer—by wire, to have it over and done with at once.

"The prospect of being shipmates with my big brother cheered me up considerably, though it made me a bit anxious, too. Ever since I remember myself as a little chap he had been very good to me, and I looked upon him as the finest fellow in the world. And so he was. No better officer ever walked the deck of a merchant ship. And that's a fact. He was a fine, strong, upstanding, sun-tanned young fellow, with his brown hair curling a little, and an eye like a hawk. He was just splendid. We hadn't seen each other for many years, and even this time, though he had been in England three weeks already, he hadn't showed up at home yet, but had spent his spare time in Surrey somewhere making up to Maggie Colchester, old Captain Colchester's niece. Her father, a great friend of dad's, was in the sugar-broking business, and Charley made a sort of second home of their house. I wondered what my big brother would think of me. There was a sort of sternness about Charley's face which never left it, not even when he was larking in his rather wild fashion.

"He received me with a great shout of laughter. He seemed to think my joining as an officer the greatest joke in the world. There was a difference of ten years between us, and I suppose he remembered me best in pinafores. I was a kid of four when he first went to sea. It surprised me to find how boisterous he could be.

" 'Now we shall see what you are made of,' he cried. And he held me off by the shoulders, and punched my ribs, and hustled me into his berth. 'Sit down, Ned. I am glad of the chance of having you with me. I'll put the finishing touch to you, my young officer, providing you're worth the trouble. And, first of all, get it

well into your head that we are not going to let this brute kill anybody this voyage. We'll stop her racket.'

"I perceived he was in dead earnest about it. He talked grimly of the ship, and how we must be careful and never allow this ugly beast to catch us napping with any of her damned tricks.

"He gave me a regular lecture on special seamanship for the use of the *Apse Family*; then changing his tone, he began to talk at large, rattling off the wildest, funniest nonsense, till my sides ached with laughing. I could see very well he was a bit above himself with high spirits. It couldn't be because of my coming. Not to that extent. But, of course, I wouldn't have dreamt of asking what was the matter. I had a proper respect for my big brother, I can tell you. But it was all made plain enough a day or two afterwards, when I heard that Miss Maggie Colchester was coming for the voyage. Uncle was giving her a sea-trip for the benefit of her health.

"I don't know what could have been wrong with her health. She had a beautiful colour, and a deuce of a lot of fair hair. She didn't care a rap for wind, or rain, or spray, or sun, or green seas, or anything. She was a blue-eyed, jolly girl of the very best sort, but the way she cheeked my big brother used to frighten me. I always expected it to end in an awful row. However, nothing decisive happened till after we had been in Sydney for a week. One day, in the men's dinner hour, Charley sticks his head into my cabin. I was stretched out on my back on the settee, smoking in peace.

" 'Come ashore with me, Ned,' he says, in his curt way.

"I jumped up, of course, and away after him down the gangway and up George Street. He strode along like a giant, and I at his elbow, panting. It was confoundedly hot. 'Where on earth are you rushing me to, Charley?' I made bold to ask.

" 'Here,' he says.

" 'Here' was a jeweller's shop. I couldn't imagine what he could want there. It seemed a sort of mad freak. He thrusts under my nose three rings, which looked very tiny on his big, brown palm, growling out—

" 'For Maggie! Which!'

"I got a kind of scare at this. I couldn't make a sound, but I pointed at the one that sparkled white and blue. He put it in his waistcoat pocket, paid for it with a lot of sovereigns, and bolted out. When we got on board I was quite out of breath. 'Shake hands, old chap,' I gasped out. He gave me a thump on the back. 'Give what orders you like to the boatswain when the hands turn-to,' says he; 'I am off duty this afternoon.'

"Then he vanished from the deck for a while, but presently he came out of the cabin with Maggie, and these two went over the gangway publicly, before all hands, going for a walk together on that awful, blazing, hot day, with clouds of dust flying about. They came back after a few hours looking very staid, but didn't seem to have the slightest idea where they had been. Anyway that's the answer they both made to Mrs. Colchester's question at tea-time.

"And didn't she turn on Charley, with her voice like an old night cabman's.

'Rubbish. Don't know where you've been! Stuff and nonsense. You've walked the girl off her legs. Don't do it again.'

"It's surprising how meek Charley could be with that old woman. Only on one occasion he whispered to me, 'I'm jolly glad she isn't Maggie's aunt, except by marriage. That's no sort of relationship.' But I think he let Maggie have too much of her own way. She was hopping all over that ship in her yachting skirt and a red tam-o'-shanter like a bright bird on a dead black tree. The old salts used to grin to themselves when they saw her coming along, and offered to teach her knots or splices. I believe she liked the men, for Charley's sake, I suppose.

"As you may imagine, the diabolic propensities of that cursed ship were never spoken of on board. Not in the cabin, at any rate. Only once on the homeward passage Charley said, incautiously, something about bringing all her crew home this time. Captain Colchester began to look uncomfortable at once, and that silly, hard-bitten old woman flew out at Charley as though he had said something indecent. I was quite confounded myself; as to Maggie, she sat completely mystified, opening her blue eyes very wide. Of course, before she was a day older she wormed it all out of me. She was a very difficult person to lie to.

" 'How awful,' she said, quite solemn. 'So many poor fellows. I am glad the voyage is nearly over. I won't have a moment's peace about Charley now.'

"I assured her Charley was all right. It took more than that ship knew to get over a seaman like Charley. And she agreed with me.

"Next day we got the tug off Dungeness; and when the tow-rope was fast Charley rubbed his hands and said to me in an undertone—

" 'We've baffled her, Ned.'

" 'Looks like it,' I said, with a grin at him. It was beautiful weather, and the sea as smooth as a millpond. We went up the river without a shadow of trouble except once, when off Hole Haven, the brute took a sudden sheer and nearly had a barge anchored just clear of the fairway. But I was aft, looking after the steering, and she did not catch me napping that time. Charley came up on the poop, looking very concerned. 'Close shave,' says he.

" 'Never mind, Charley,' I answered, cheerily. 'You've tamed her.'

"We were to tow right up to the dock. The river pilot boarded us below Gravesend, and the first words I heard him say were: 'You may just as well take your port anchor inboard at once, Mr. Mate.'

"This had been done when I went forward. I saw Maggie on the forecastle head enjoying the bustle, and I begged her to go aft, but she took no notice of me, of course. Then Charley, who was very busy with the head gear, caught sight of her and shouted in his biggest voice: 'Get off the forecastle head, Maggie. You're in the way here.' For all answer she made a funny face at him, and I saw poor Charley turn away, hiding a smile. She was flushed with the excitement of getting home again, and her blue eyes seemed to snap electric sparks as she looked at the river. A collier brig had gone round just ahead of us, and our tug had to stop her engines in a hurry to avoid running into her.

"In a moment, as is usually the case, all the shipping in the reach seemed to get into a hopeless tangle. A schooner and a ketch got up a small collision all

to themselves right in the middle of the river. It was exciting to watch, and, meantime, our tug remained stopped. Any other ship than that brute could have been coaxed to keep straight for a couple of minutes—but not she! Her head fell off at once, and she began to drift down, taking her tug along with her. I noticed a cluster of coasters at anchor within a quarter of a mile of us, and I thought I had better speak to the pilot. 'If you let her get amongst that lot,' I said quietly, 'she will grind some of them to bits before we get her out again.'

" 'Don't I know her!' cries he, stamping his foot in a perfect fury. And he out with his whistle to make that bothered tug get the ship's head up again as quick as possible. He blew like mad, waving his arm to port, and presently we could see that the tug's engines had been set going ahead. Her paddles churned the water, but it was as if she had been trying to tow a rock—she couldn't get an inch out of that ship. Again the pilot blew his whistle, and waved his arms to port. We could see the tug's paddles turning faster and faster away, broad on our bow.

"For a moment tug and ship hung motionless in a crowd of moving shipping, and then the terrific strain that evil, stony-hearted brute would always put on everything, tore the towing-chock clean out. The tow-rope surged over, snapping the iron stanchions of the head-rail one after another as if they had been sticks of sealing-wax. It was only then I noticed that in order to have a better view over our heads, Maggie had stepped upon the port anchor as it lay flat on the forecastle deck.

"It had been lowered properly into its hardwood beds, but there had been no time to take a turn with it. Anyway, it was quite secure as it was, for going into dock; but I could see directly that the tow-rope would sweep under the fluke in another second. My heart flew up right into my throat, but not before I had time to yell out: 'Jump clear of that anchor!'

"But I hadn't time to shriek out her name. I don't suppose she heard me at all. The first touch of the hawser against the fluke threw her down; she was up on her feet again as quick as lightning, but she was up on the wrong side. I heard a horrid, scraping sound, and then that anchor, tipping over, rose up like something alive; its great, rough iron arm caught Maggie round the waist, seemed to clasp her close with a dreadful hug, and flung itself with her over and down in a terrific clang of iron, followed by heavy ringing blows that shook the ship from stern to stem—because the ring stopper held!"

"How horrible!" I exclaimed.

"I used to dream for years afterwards of anchors catching hold of girls," said the man in tweeds, a little wildly. He shuddered. "With a most pitiful howl Charley was over after her almost on the instant. But, Lord! he didn't see as much as a gleam of her red tam-o'-shanter in the water. Nothing! nothing whatever! In a moment there were half-a-dozen boats around us, and he got pulled into one. I, with the boatswain and the carpenter, let go the other anchor in a hurry and brought the ship up somehow. The pilot had gone silly. He walked up and down the forecastle head wringing his hands and muttering to himself:

'Killing women, now! Killing women now!' Not another word could you get out of him.

"Dusk fell, then a night black as pitch; and peering upon the river I heard a low, mournful hail, 'Ship, ahoy!' Two Gravesend watermen came alongside. They had a lantern in their wherry, and looked up the ship's side, holding on to the ladder without a word. I saw in the patch of light a lot of loose, fair hair down there."

He shuddered again.

"After the tide turned poor Maggie's body had floated clear of one of them big mooring buoys," he explained. "I crept aft, feeling half-dead and managed to send a rocket up—to let the other searchers know, on the river. And then I slunk away forward like a cur, and spent the night sitting on the heel of the bowsprit so as to be as far as possible out of Charley's way."

"Poor fellow!" I murmured.

"Yes. Poor fellow," he repeated musingly. "That brute wouldn't let him—not even him—cheat her of her prey. But he made her fast in dock next morning. He did. We hadn't exchanged a word—not a single look for that matter. I didn't want to look at him. When the last rope was fast he put his hands to his head and stood gazing down at his feet as if trying to remember something. The men waited on the main deck for the words that end the voyage. Perhaps that is what he was trying to remember. I spoke for him. 'That'll do, men.'

"I never saw a crew leave a ship so quietly. They sneaked over the rail one after another, taking care not to bang their sea chests too heavily. They looked our way, but not one had the stomach to come up and offer to shake hands with the mate as is usual.

"I followed him all over the empty ship to and fro, here and there, with no living soul about but the two of us, because the old ship-keeper had locked himself up in the galley—both doors. Suddenly poor Charley mutters, in a crazy voice: 'I'm done here,' and strides down the gangway with me at his heels, up the dock, out at the gate, on towards Tower Hill. He used to take rooms with a decent old landlady in America Square, to be near his work.

"All at once he stops short, turns round, and comes back straight at me. 'Ned,' says he, 'I am going home.' I had the good luck to sight a four-wheeler and got him in just in time. His legs were beginning to give way. In our hall he fell down on a chair, and I'll never forget father's and mother's amazed, perfectly still faces as they stood over him. They couldn't understand what had happened to him till I blubbered out 'Maggie got drowned, yesterday, in the river.'

"Mother let out a little cry. Father looks from him to me, and from me to him, as if comparing our faces—for, upon my soul, Charley did not resemble himself at all. Nobody moved: and the poor fellow raises his big brown hands slowly to his throat, and with one single tug rips everything open—collar, shirt, waistcoat,—a perfect wreck and ruin of a man. Father and I got him upstairs somehow, and mother pretty nearly killed herself nursing him through a brain fever."

The man in tweeds nodded at me significantly.

"Ah! there was nothing that could be done with that brute. She had a devil in her."

"Where's your brother?" I asked, expecting to hear he was dead. But he was commanding a smart steamer on the China coast, and never came home now.

Jermyn fetched a heavy sigh, and the handkerchief being now sufficiently dry, put it up tenderly to his red and lamentable nose.

"She was a ravening beast," the man in tweeds started again. "Old Colchester put his foot down and resigned. And would you believe it? Apse & Sons wrote to ask whether he wouldn't reconsider his decision! Anything to save the good name of the *Apse Family*! Old Colchester went to the office then and said that he would take charge again but only to sail her out into the North Sea and scuttle her there. He was nearly off his chump. He used to be darkish iron-grey, but his hair went snow-white in a fortnight. And Mr. Lucian Apse (they had known each other as young men) pretended not to notice it. Eh? Here's infatuation if you like! Here's pride for you!

"They jumped at the first man they could get to take her, for fear of the scandal of the *Apse Family* not being able to find a skipper. He was a festive soul, I believe, but he stuck to her grim and hard. Wilmot was his second mate. A harum-scarum fellow, and pretending to a great scorn for all the girls. The fact is he was really timid. But let only one of them do as much as lift her little finger in encouragement, and there was nothing that could hold the beggar. As apprentice, once, he deserted abroad after a petticoat, and would have gone to the dogs then if his skipper hadn't taken the trouble to find him and lug him by the ears out of some house of perdition or other.

"It was said that one of the firm had been heard once to express a hope that this brute of a ship would get lost soon. I can hardly credit the tale, unless it might have been Mr. Alfred Apse, whom the family didn't think much of. They had him in the office, but he was considered a bad egg altogether, always flying off to race meetings and coming home drunk. You would have thought that a ship so full of deadly tricks would run herself ashore some day out of sheer cussedness. But not she! She was going to last for ever. She had a nose to keep off the bottom."

Jermyn made a grunt of approval.

"A ship after a pilot's own heart, eh?" jeered the man in tweeds. "Well, Wilmot managed it. He was the man for it, but even he, perhaps, couldn't have done the trick without that green-eyed governess, or nurse, or whatever she was to the children of Mr. and Mrs. Pamphilius.

"Those people were passengers in her from Port Adelaide to the Cape. Well, the ship went out and anchored outside for the day. The skipper—hospitable soul—had a lot of guests from town to a farewell lunch—as usual with him. It was five in the evening before the last shore boat left the side, and the weather looked ugly and dark in the gulf. There was no reason for him to get under way. However, as he had told everybody he was going that day, he imagined it was proper to do so anyhow. But as he had no mind after all these festivities to tackle the straits in the dark, with a scant wind, he gave orders to keep the ship

under lower topsails and foresail as close as she would lie, dodging along the land till the morning. Then he sought his virtuous couch. The mate was on deck, having his face washed very clean with hard rain squalls. Wilmot relieved him at midnight.

"The *Apse Family* had, as you observed, a house on her poop. . . ."

"A big, ugly white thing, sticking up," Jermyn murmured sadly, at the fire.

"That's it: a companion for the cabin stairs and a sort of chart-room combined. The rain drove in gusts on the sleepy Wilmot. The ship was then surging slowly to the southward, close hauled, with the coast within three miles or so to windward. There was nothing to look out for in that part of the gulf, and Wilmot went round to dodge the squalls under the lee of that chart-room, whose door on that side was open. The night was black, like a barrel of coal-tar. And then he heard a woman's voice whispering to him.

"That confounded green-eyed girl of the Pamphilius people had put the kids to bed a long time ago, of course, but it seems couldn't get to sleep herself. She heard eight bells struck, and the chief mate come below to turn in. She waited a bit, then got into her dressing-gown and stole across the empty saloon and up the stairs into the chart-room. She sat down on the settee near the open door to cool herself, I daresay.

"I suppose when she whispered to Wilmot it was as if somebody had struck a match in the fellow's brain. I don't know how it was they had got so very thick. I fancy he had met her ashore a few times before. I couldn't make it out, because, when telling the story, Wilmot would break off to swear something awful at every second word. We had met on the quay in Sydney, and he had an apron of sacking up to his chin, a big whip in his hand. A wagon-driver. Glad to do anything not to starve. That's what he had come down to.

"However, there he was, with his head inside the door, on the girl's shoulder as likely as not—officer of the watch! The helmsman, on giving his evidence afterwards, said that he shouted several times that the binnacle lamp had gone out. It didn't matter to him, because his orders were to 'sail her close.' 'I thought it funny,' he said, 'that the ship should keep on falling off in squalls, but I luffed her up every time as close as I was able. It was so dark I couldn't see my hand before my face, and the rain came in bucketsful on my head.'

"The truth was that at every squall the wind hauled aft a little, till gradually the ship came to be heading straight for the coast, without a single soul in her being aware of it. Wilmot himself confessed that he had not been near the standard compass for an hour. He might well have confessed! The first thing he knew was the man on the look-out shouting blue murder forward there.

"He tore his neck free, he says, and yelled back at him: 'What do you say?'

"'I think I hear breakers ahead, sir,' howled the man and came rushing aft with the rest of the watch, in the 'awfullest blinding deluge that ever fell from the sky,' Wilmot says. For a second or so he was so scared and bewildered that he could not remember on which side of the gulf the ship was. He wasn't a good officer, but he was a seaman all the same. He pulled himself together in a

second, and the right orders sprang to his lips without thinking. They were to hard up with the helm and shiver the main and mizzen-topsails.

"It seems that the sails actually fluttered. He couldn't see them, but he heard them rattling and banging above his head. 'No use! She was too slow in going off,' he went on, his dirty face twitching, and the damn'd carter's whip shaking in his hand. 'She seemed to stick fast.' And then the flutter of the canvas above his head ceased. At this critical moment the wind hauled aft again with a gust, filling the sails, and sending the ship with a great way upon the rocks on her lee bow. She had overreached herself in her last little game. Her time had come—the hour, the man, the black night, the treacherous gust of wind—the right woman to put an end to her. The brute deserved nothing better. Strange are the instruments of Providence. There's a sort of poetical justice——"

The man in tweeds looked hard at me.

"The first ledge she went over stripped the false keel off her. Rip! The skipper, rushing out of his berth, found a crazy woman, in a red flannel dressing-gown, flying round and round the cuddy, screeching like a cockatoo.

"The next bump knocked her clean under the cabin table. It also started the stern-post and carried away the rudder, and then that brute ran up a shelving, rocky shore, tearing her bottom out, till she stopped short, and the foremast dropped over the bows like a gangway."

"Anybody lost?" I asked.

"No one, unless that fellow Wilmot," answered the gentleman, unknown to Miss Blank, looking round for his cap. "And his case was worse than drowning for a man. Everybody got ashore all right. Gale didn't come on till next day, dead from the West, and broke up that brute in a surprisingly short time. It was as though she had been rotten at heart." . . . He changed his tone. "Rain left off. I must get my bike and rush home to dinner. I live in Herne Bay—came out for a spin this morning."

He nodded at me in a friendly way, and went out with a swagger.

"Do you know who he is, Jermyn?" I asked.

The North Sea pilot shook his head, dismally. "Fancy losing a ship in that silly fashion! Oh dear! oh dear!" he groaned in lugubrious tones, spreading his damp handkerchief again like a curtain before the glowing grate.

On going out I exchanged a glance and a smile (strictly proper) with the respectable Miss Blank, barmaid of the Three Crows.

May Sinclair

WHERE THEIR FIRE IS NOT QUENCHED

from UNCANNY STORIES

The Macmillan Company

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There was nobody in the orchard. Harriott Leigh went out, carefully, through the iron gate into the field. She had made the latch slip into its notch without a sound.

The path slanted widely up the field from the orchard gate to the stile under the elder tree. George Waring waited for her there.

Years afterwards, when she thought of George Waring she smelt the sweet, hot, wine-scent of the elder flowers. Years afterwards, when she smelt elder flowers she saw George Waring, with his beautiful, gentle face, like a poet's or a musician's, his black-blue eyes, and sleek, olive-brown hair. He was a naval lieutenant.

Yesterday he had asked her to marry him and she had consented. But her father hadn't, and she had come to tell him that and say good-bye before he left her. His ship was to sail the next day.

He was eager and excited. He couldn't believe that anything could stop their happiness, that anything he didn't want to happen could happen.

"Well?" he said.

"He's a perfect beast, George. He won't let us. He says we're too young."

"I was twenty last August," he said, aggrieved.

"And I shall be seventeen in September."

"And this is June. We're quite old, really. How long does he mean us to wait?"

"Three years."

"Three years before we can be engaged even—Why, we might be dead."

She put her arms round him to make him feel safe. They kissed; and the sweet, hot, wine-scent of the elder flowers mixed with their kisses. They stood, pressed close together, under the elder tree.

Across the yellow fields of charlock they heard the village clock strike seven. Up in the house a gong clanged.

"Darling, I must go," she said.

"Oh stay—stay *five* minutes."

He pressed her close. It lasted five minutes, and five more. Then he was

running fast down the road to the station, while Harriott went along the field-path, slowly, struggling with her tears.

"He'll be back in three months," she said. "I can live through three months."

But he never came back. There was something wrong with the engines of his ship, the *Alexandra*. Three weeks later she went down in the Mediterranean, and George with her.

Harriott said she didn't care how soon she died now. She was quite sure it would be soon, because she couldn't live without him.

Five years passed.

The two lines of beech trees stretched on and on, the whole length of the Park, a broad green drive between. When you came to the middle they branched off right and left in the form of a cross, and at the end of the right arm there was a white stucco pavilion with pillars and a three-cornered pediment like a Greek temple. At the end of the left arm, the west entrance to the Park, double gates and a side door.

Harriott, on her stone seat at the back of the pavilion, could see Stephen Philpotts the very minute he came through the side door.

He had asked her to wait for him there. It was the place he always chose to read his poems aloud in. The poems were a pretext. She knew what he was going to say. And she knew what she would answer.

There were elder bushes in flower at the back of the pavilion, and Harriott thought of George Waring. She told herself that George was nearer to her now than he could ever have been, living. If she married Stephen she would not be unfaithful, because she loved him with another part of herself. It was not as though Stephen were taking George's place. She loved Stephen with her soul, in an unearthly way.

But her body quivered like a stretched wire when the door opened and the young man came towards her down the drive under the beech trees.

She loved him; she loved his slenderness, his darkness and sallow whiteness, his black eyes lighting up with the intellectual flame, the way his black hair swept back from his forehead, the way he walked, tiptoe, as if his feet were lifted with wings.

He sat down beside her. She could see his hands tremble. She felt that her moment was coming; it had come.

"I wanted to see you alone because there's something I must say to you. I don't quite know how to begin. . . ."

Her lips parted. She panted lightly.

"You've heard me speak of Sybill Foster?"

Her voice came stammering, "N-no, Stephen. Did you?"

"Well, I didn't mean to, till I knew it was all right. I only heard yesterday."

"Heard what?"

"Why, that she'll have me. Oh, Harriott—do you know what it's like to be terribly happy?"

She knew. She had known just now, the moment before he told her. She sat

there, stone-cold and stiff, listening to his raptures, listening to her own voice saying she was glad.

Ten years passed.

Harriott Leigh sat waiting in the drawing-room of a small house in Maida Vale. She had lived there ever since her father's death two years before.

She was restless. She kept on looking at the clock to see if it was four, the hour that Oscar Wade had appointed. She was not sure that he would come, after she had sent him away yesterday.

She now asked herself, why, when she had sent him away yesterday, she had let him come to-day. Her motives were not altogether clear. If she really meant what she had said then, she oughtn't to let him come to her again. Never again.

She had shown him plainly what she meant. She could see herself, sitting very straight in her chair, uplifted by a passionate integrity, while he stood before her, hanging his head, ashamed and beaten; she could feel again the throb in her voice as she kept on saying that she couldn't, she couldn't; he must see that she couldn't; that no, nothing would make her change her mind; she couldn't forget he had a wife; that he must think of Muriel.

To which he had answered savagely: "I needn't. That's all over. We only live together for the look of the thing."

And she, serenely, with great dignity: "And for the look of the thing, Oscar, we must leave off seeing each other. Please go."

"Do you mean it?"

"Yes. We must never see each other again."

And he had gone then, ashamed and beaten.

She could see him, squaring his broad shoulders to meet the blow. And she was sorry for him. She told herself she had been unnecessarily hard. Why shouldn't they see each other again, now he understood where they must draw the line? Until yesterday the line had never been very clearly drawn. To-day she meant to ask him to forget what he had said to her. Once it was forgotten, they could go on being friends as if nothing had happened.

It was four o'clock. Half-past. Five. She had finished tea and given him up when, between the half-hour and six o'clock, he came.

He came as he had come a dozen times, with his measured, deliberate, thoughtful tread, carrying himself well braced, with a sort of held-in arrogance, his great shoulders heaving. He was a man of about forty, broad and tall, lean-flanked and short-necked, his straight, handsome features showing small and even in the big square face and in the flush that swamped it. The close-clipped, reddish-brown moustache bristled forwards from the pushed-out upper lip. His small, flat eyes shone, reddish-brown, eager and animal.

She liked to think of him when he was not there, but always at the first sight of him she felt a slight shock. Physically, he was very far from her admired ideal. So different from George Waring and Stephen Philpotts.

He sat down, facing her.

There was an embarrassed silence, broken by Oscar Wade.

"Well, Harriott, you said I could come." He seemed to be throwing the responsibility on her.

"So I suppose you've forgiven me," he said.

"Oh, yes, Oscar, I've forgiven you."

He said she'd better show it by coming to dine with him somewhere that evening.

She could give no reason to herself for going. She simply went.

He took her to a restaurant in Soho. Oscar Wade dined well, even extravagantly, giving each dish its importance. She liked his extravagance. He had none of the mean virtues.

It was over. His flushed, embarrassed silence told her what he was thinking. But when he had seen her home, he left her at her garden gate. He had thought better of it.

She was not sure whether she were glad or sorry. She had had her moment of righteous exaltation and she had enjoyed it. But there was no joy in the weeks that followed. She had given up Oscar Wade because she didn't want him very much; and now she wanted him furiously, perversely, because she had given him up. Though he had no resemblance to her ideal, she couldn't live without him.

She dined with him again and again, till she knew Schnebler's Restaurant by heart, the white panelled walls picked out with gold; the white pillars, and the curling gold fronds of their capitals; the Turkey carpets, blue and crimson, soft under her feet; the thick crimson velvet cushions, that clung to her skirts; the glitter of silver and glass on the innumerable white circles of the tables. And the faces of the diners, red, white, pink, brown, grey and sallow, distorted and excited; the curled mouths that twisted as they ate; the convoluted electric bulbs pointing, pointing down at them, under the red, crinkled shades. All shimmering in a thick air that the red light stained as wine stains water.

And Oscar's face, flushed with his dinner. Always, when he leaned back from the table and brooded in silence she knew what he was thinking. His heavy eyelids would lift; she would find his eyes fixed on hers, wondering, considering.

She knew now what the end would be. She thought of George Waring, and Stephen Philpotts, and of her life, cheated. She hadn't chosen Oscar, she hadn't really wanted him; but now he had forced himself on her she couldn't afford to let him go. Since George died no man had loved her, no other man ever would. And she was sorry for him when she thought of him going from her, beaten and ashamed.

She was certain, before he was, of the end. Only she didn't know when and where and how it would come. That was what Oscar knew.

It came at the close of one of their evenings when they had dined in a private sitting-room. He said he couldn't stand the heat and noise of the public restaurant.

She went before him, up a steep, red-carpeted stair to a white door on the second landing.

From time to time they repeated the furtive, hidden adventure. Sometimes she met him in the room above Schnebler's. Sometimes, when her maid was out,

she received him at her house in Maida Vale. But that was dangerous, not to be risked too often.

Oscar declared himself unspeakably happy. Harriott was not quite sure. This was love, the thing she had never had, that she had dreamed of, hungered and thirsted for; but now she had it she was not satisfied. Always she looked for something just beyond it, some mystic, heavenly rapture, always beginning to come, that never came. There was something about Oscar that repelled her. But because she had taken him for her lover, she couldn't bring herself to admit that it was a certain coarseness. She looked another way and pretended it wasn't there. To justify herself, she fixed her mind on his good qualities, his generosities, his strength, the way he had built up his engineering business. She made him take her over his works, and show her his great dynamos. She made him lend her the books he read. But always, when she tried to talk to him, he let her see that *that* wasn't what she was there for.

"My dear girl, we haven't time," he said. "It's waste of our priceless moments."

She persisted. "There's something wrong about it all if we can't talk to each other."

He was irritated. "Women never seem to consider that a man can get all the talk he wants from other men. What's wrong is our meeting in this unsatisfactory way. We ought to live together. It's the only sane thing. I would, only I don't want to break up Muriel's home and make her miserable."

"I thought you said she wouldn't care."

"My dear, she cares for her home and her position and the children. You forget the children."

Yes. She had forgotten the children. She had forgotten Muriel. She had left off thinking of Oscar as a man with a wife and children and a home.

He had a plan. His mother-in-law was coming to stay with Muriel in October and he would get away. He would go to Paris, and Harriott should come to him there. He could say he went on business. No need to lie about it; he *had* business in Paris.

He engaged rooms in an hotel in the rue de Rivoli. They spent two weeks there.

For three days Oscar was madly in love with Harriott and Harriott with him. As she lay awake she would turn on the light and look at him as he slept at her side. Sleep made him beautiful and innocent; it laid a fine, smooth tissue over his coarseness; it made his mouth gentle; it entirely hid his eyes.

In six days reaction had set in. At the end of the tenth day, Harriott, returning with Oscar from Montmartre, burst into a fit of crying. When questioned, she answered wildly that the Hotel Saint Pierre was too hideously ugly; it was getting on her nerves. Mercifully Oscar explained her state as fatigue following excitement. She tried hard to believe that she was miserable because her love was purer and more spiritual than Oscar's; but all the time she knew perfectly well she had cried from pure boredom. She was in love with Oscar, and Oscar

bored her. Oscar was in love with her, and she bored him. At close quarters, day in and day out, each was revealed to the other as an incredible bore.

At the end of the second week she began to doubt whether she had ever been really in love with him.

Her passion returned for a little while after they got back to London. Freed from the unnatural strain which Paris had put on them, they persuaded themselves that their romantic temperaments were better fitted to the old life of casual adventure.

Then, gradually, the sense of danger began to wake in them. They lived in perpetual fear, face to face with all the chances of discovery. They tormented themselves and each other by imagining possibilities that they would never have considered in their first fine moments. It was as though they were beginning to ask themselves if it were, after all, worth while running such awful risks, for all they got out of it. Oscar still swore that if he had been free he would have married her. He pointed out that his intentions at any rate were regular. But she asked herself: Would I marry *him*? Marriage would be the Hotel Saint Pierre all over again, without any possibility of escape. But, if she wouldn't marry him, was she in love with him? That was the test. Perhaps it was a good thing he wasn't free. Then she told herself that these doubts were morbid, and that the question wouldn't arise.

One evening Oscar called to see her. He had come to tell her that Muriel was ill.

"Seriously ill?"

"I'm afraid so. It's pleurisy. May turn to pneumonia. We shall know one way or another in the next few days."

A terrible fear seized upon Harriott. Muriel might die of her pleurisy; and if Muriel died, she would have to marry Oscar. He was looking at her queerly, as if he knew what she was thinking, and she could see that the same thought had occurred to him and that he was frightened too.

Muriel got well again; but their danger had enlightened them. Muriel's life was now inconceivably precious to them both; she stood between them and that permanent union, which they dreaded and yet would not have the courage to refuse.

After enlightenment the rupture.

It came from Oscar, one evening when he sat with her in her drawing-room.

"Harriott," he said, "do you know I'm thinking seriously of settling down?"

"How do you mean, settling down?"

"Patching it up with Muriel, poor girl. . . . Has it never occurred to you that this little affair of ours can't go on for ever?"

"You don't want it to go on?"

"I don't want to have any humbug about it. For God's sake, let's be straight. If it's done, it's done. Let's end it decently."

"I see. You want to get rid of me."

"That's a beastly way of putting it."

"Is there any way that isn't beastly? The whole thing's beastly. I should have thought you'd have stuck to it now you've made it what you wanted. When I haven't an ideal, I haven't a single illusion, when you've destroyed everything you didn't want."

"What didn't I want?"

"The clean, beautiful part of it. The part *I* wanted."

"My part at least was real. It was cleaner and more beautiful than all that putrid stuff you wrapped it up in. You were a hypocrite, Harriott, and I wasn't. You're a hypocrite now if you say you weren't happy with me."

"I was never really happy. Never for one moment. There was always something I missed. Something you didn't give me. Perhaps you couldn't."

"No. I wasn't spiritual enough," he sneered.

"You were not. And you made me what you were."

"Oh, I noticed that you were always very spiritual *after* you'd got what you wanted."

"What I wanted?" she cried. "Oh, my God—"

"If you ever knew what you wanted."

"What—I—wanted," she repeated, drawing out her bitterness.

"Come," he said, "why not be honest? Face facts. I was awfully gone on you. You were awfully gone on me—once. We got tired of each other and it's over. But at least you might own we had a good time while it lasted."

"A good time?"

"Good enough for me."

"For you, because for you love only means one thing. Everything that's high and noble in it you dragged down to that, till there's nothing left for us but that. *That's* what you made of love."

Twenty years passed.

It was Oscar who died first, three years after the rupture. He did it suddenly one evening, falling down in a fit of apoplexy.

His death was an immense relief to Harriott. Perfect security had been impossible as long as he was alive. But now there wasn't a living soul who knew her secret.

Still, in the first moment of shock Harriott told herself that Oscar dead would be nearer to her than ever. She forgot how little she had wanted him to be near her, alive. And long before the twenty years had passed she had contrived to persuade herself that he had never been near to her at all. It was incredible that she had ever known such a person as Oscar Wade. As for their affair, she couldn't think of Harriott Leigh as the sort of woman to whom such a thing could happen. Schnebler's and the Hotel Saint Pierre ceased to figure among prominent images of her past. Her memories, if she had allowed herself to remember, would have clashed disagreeably with the reputation for sanctity which she had now acquired.

For Harriott at fifty-two was the friend and helper of the Reverend Clement Farmer, Vicar of St. Mary the Virgin, Maida Vale. She worked as a deaconess

in his parish, wearing the uniform of a deaconess, the semi-religious gown, the cloak, the bonnet and veil, the cross and rosary, the holy smile. She was also secretary to the Maida Vale and Kilburn Home for Fallen Girls.

Her moments of excitement came when Clement Farmer, the lean, austere likeness of Stephen Philpotts, in his cassock and lace-bordered surplice, issued from the vestry, when he mounted the pulpit, when he stood before the altar rails and lifted up his arms in the Benediction; her moments of ecstasy when she received the Sacrament from his hands. And she had moments of calm happiness when his study door closed on their communion. All these moments were saturated with a solemn holiness.

And they were insignificant compared with the moment of her dying.

She lay dozing in her white bed under the black crucifix with the ivory Christ. The basins and medicine bottles had been cleared from the table by her pillow; it was spread for the last rites. The priest moved quietly about the room, arranging the candles, the Prayer Book and the Holy Sacrament. Then he drew a chair to her bedside and watched with her, waiting for her to come up out of her doze.

She woke suddenly. Her eyes were fixed upon him. She had a flash of lucidity. She was dying, and her dying made her supremely important to Clement Farmer.

"Are you ready?" he asked.

"Not yet. I think I'm afraid. Make me not afraid."

He rose and lit the two candles on the altar. He took down the crucifix from the wall and stood it against the foot-rail of the bed.

She sighed. That was not what she had wanted.

"You will not be afraid now," he said.

"I'm not afraid of the hereafter. I suppose you get used to it. Only it may be terrible just at first."

"Our first state will depend very much on what we are thinking of at our last hour."

"There'll be my—confession," she said.

"And after it you will receive the Sacrament. Then you will have your mind fixed firmly upon God and your Redeemer. . . . Do you feel able to make your confession now, Sister? Everything is ready."

Her mind went back over her past and found Oscar Wade there. She wondered: Should she confess to him about Oscar Wade? One moment she thought it was possible; the next she knew that she couldn't. She could not. It wasn't necessary. For twenty years he had not been part of her life. No. She wouldn't confess about Oscar Wade. She had been guilty of other sins.

She made a careful selection.

"I have cared too much for the beauty of this world. . . . I have failed in charity to my poor girls. Because of my intense repugnance to their sin. . . . I have thought, often, about—people I love, when I should have been thinking about God."

After that she received the Sacrament.

"Now," he said, "there is nothing to be afraid of."

"I won't be afraid if—if you would hold my hand."

He held it. And she lay still a long time, with her eyes shut. Then he heard her murmuring something. He stooped close.

"This—is—dying. I thought it would be horrible. And it's bliss. . . . Bliss."

The priest's hand slackened, as if at the bidding of some wonder. She gave a weak cry.

"Oh—don't let me go."

His grasp tightened.

"Try," he said, "to think about God. Keep on looking at the crucifix."

"If I look," she whispered, "you won't let go my hand?"

"I will not let you go."

He held it till it was wrenched from him in the last agony.

She lingered for some hours in the room where these things had happened. Its aspect was familiar and yet unfamiliar, and slightly repugnant to her. The altar, the crucifix, the lighted candles, suggested some tremendous and awful experience the details of which she was not able to recall. She seemed to remember that they had been connected in some way with the sheeted body on the bed; but the nature of the connection was not clear; and she did not associate the dead body with herself. When the nurse came in and laid it out, she saw that it was the body of a middle-aged woman. Her own living body was that of a young woman of about thirty-two.

Her mind had no past and no future, no sharp-edged, coherent memories, and no idea of anything to be done next.

Then, suddenly, the room began to come apart before her eyes, to split into shafts of floor and furniture and ceiling that shifted and were thrown by their commotion into different planes. They leaned slanting at every possible angle; they crossed and overlaid each other with a transparent mingling of dislocated perspectives, like reflections fallen on an interior seen behind glass.

The bed and the sheeted body slid away somewhere out of sight. She was standing by the door that still remained in position.

She opened it and found herself in the street, outside a building of yellowish-grey brick and freestone, with a tall slated spire. Her mind came together with a palpable click of recognition. This object was the Church of St. Mary the Virgin, Maida Vale. She could hear the droning of the organ. She opened the door and slipped in.

She had gone back into a definite space and time, and recovered a certain limited section of coherent memory. She remembered the rows of pitch-pine benches, with their Gothic peaks and mouldings; the stone-coloured walls and pillars with their chocolate stencilling; the hanging rings of lights along the aisles of the nave; the high altar with its lighted candles, and the polished brass cross, twinkling. These things were somehow permanent and real, adjusted to the image that now took possession of her.

She knew what she had come there for. The service was over. The choir had

gone from the chancel; the sacristan moved before the altar, putting out the candles. She walked up the middle aisle to a seat that she knew under the pulpit. She knelt down and covered her face with her hands. Peeping sideways through her fingers, she could see the door of the vestry on her left at the end of the north aisle. She watched it steadily.

Up in the organ loft the organist drew out the Recessional, slowly and softly, to its end in the two solemn, vibrating chords.

The vestry door opened and Clement Farmer came out, dressed in his black cassock. He passed before her, close, close outside the bench where she knelt. He paused at the opening. He was waiting for her. There was something he had to say.

She stood up and went towards him. He still waited. He didn't move to make way for her. She came close, closer than she had ever come to him, so close that his features grew indistinct. She bent her head back, peering short-sightedly, and found herself looking into Oscar Wade's face.

He stood still, horribly still, and close, barring her passage.

She drew back; his heaving shoulders followed her. He leaned forward, covering her with his eyes. She opened her mouth to scream and no sound came.

She was afraid to move lest he should move with her. The heaving of his shoulders terrified her.

One by one the lights in the side aisles were going out. The lights in the middle aisle would go next. They had gone. If she didn't get away she would be shut up with him there, in the appalling darkness.

She turned and moved towards the north aisle, groping, steadying herself by the book ledge.

When she looked back, Oscar Wade was not there.

Then she remembered that Oscar Wade was dead. Therefore, what she had seen was not Oscar; it was his ghost. He was dead; dead seventeen years ago. She was safe from him for ever.

When she came out on to the steps of the church she saw that the road it stood in had changed. It was not the road she remembered. The pavement on this side was raised slightly and covered in. It ran under a succession of arches. It was a long gallery walled with glittering shop windows on one side; on the other a line of tall grey columns divided it from the street.

She was going along the arcades of the rue de Rivoli. Ahead of her she could see the edge of an immense grey pillar jutting out. That was the porch of the Hotel Saint Pierre. The revolving glass doors swung forward to receive her; she crossed the grey, sultry vestibule under the pillared arches. She knew it. She knew the porter's shining, wine-coloured, mahogany pen on her left, and the shining, wine-coloured, mahogany barrier of the clerk's bureau on her right; she made straight for the great grey carpeted staircase; she climbed the endless flights that turned round and round the caged-in shaft of the well, past the latticed doors of the lift, and came up on to a landing that she knew, and into the long, ash-grey, foreign corridor lit by a dull window at one end.

It was there that the horror of the place came on her. She had no longer any memory of St. Mary's Church, so that she was unaware of her backward course through time. All space and time were here.

She remembered she had to go to the left, the left.

But there was something there; where the corridor turned by the window; at the end of all the corridors. If she went the other way she would escape it.

The corridor stopped there. A blank wall. She was driven back past the stair-head to the left.

At the corner, by the window, she turned down another long ash-grey corridor on her right, and to the right again where the night-light sputtered on the table-flap at the turn.

This third corridor was dark and secret and depraved. She knew the soiled walls, and the warped door at the end. There was a sharp-pointed streak of light at the top. She could see the number on it now, 107.

Something had happened there. If she went in it would happen again.

Oscar Wade was in the room waiting for her behind the closed door. She felt him moving about in there. She leaned forward, her ear to the key-hole, and listened. She could hear the measured, deliberate, thoughtful footsteps. They were coming from the bed to the door.

She turned and ran; her knees gave way under her; she sank and ran on, down the long grey corridors and the stairs, quick and blind, a hunted beast seeking for cover, hearing his feet coming after her.

The revolving doors caught her and pushed her out into the street.

The strange quality of her state was this, that it had no time. She remembered dimly that there had once been a thing called time; but she had forgotten altogether what it was like. She was aware of things happening and about to happen; she fixed them by the place they occupied, and measured their duration by the space she went through.

So now she thought: If I could only go back and get to the place where it hadn't happened.

To get back farther—

She was walking now on a white road that went between broad grass borders. To the right and left were the long raking lines of the hills, curve after curve, shimmering in a thin mist.

The road dropped to the green valley. It mounted the humped bridge over the river. Beyond it she saw the twin gables of the grey house pricked up over the high, grey garden wall. The tall iron gate stood in front of it between the ball-topped stone pillars.

And now she was in a large, low-ceilinged room with drawn blinds. She was standing before the wide double bed. It was her father's bed. The dead body, stretched out in the middle under the drawn white sheet, was her father's body.

The outline of the sheet sank from the peak of the upturned toes to the shin bone, and from the high bridge of the nose to the chin.

She lifted the sheet and folded it back across the breast of the dead man. The

face she saw then was Oscar Wade's face, stilled and smoothed in the innocence of sleep, the supreme innocence of death. She stared at it, fascinated, in a cold, pitiless joy.

Oscar was dead.

She remembered how he used to lie like that beside her in the room in the Hotel Saint Pierre, on his back with his hands folded on his waist, his mouth half open, his big chest rising and falling. If he was dead, it would never happen again. She would be safe.

The dead face frightened her, and she was about to cover it up again when she was aware of a light heaving, a rhythmical rise and fall. As she drew the sheet up tighter, the hands under it began to struggle convulsively, the broad ends of the fingers appeared above the edge, clutching it to keep it down. The mouth opened; the eyes opened; the whole face stared back at her in a look of agony and horror.

Then the body drew itself forwards from the hips and sat up, its eyes peering into her eyes; he and she remained for an instant motionless, each held there by the other's fear.

Suddenly she broke away, turned and ran, out of the room, out of the house.

She stood at the gate, looking up and down the road, not knowing by which way she must go to escape Oscar. To the right, over the bridge and up the hill and across the downs she would come to the arcades of the rue de Rivoli and the dreadful grey corridors of the hotel. To the left the road went through the village.

If she could get further back she would be safe, out of Oscar's reach. Standing by her father's death-bed she had been young, but not young enough. She must get back to the place where she was younger still, to the Park and the green drive under the beech trees and the white pavilion at the cross. She knew how to find it. At the end of the village the high road ran right and left, east and west, under the Park walls; the south gate stood there at the top looking down the narrow street.

She ran towards it through the village, past the long grey barns of Goodyer's farm, past the grocer's shop, past the yellow front and blue sign of the "Queen's Head," past the post office, with its one black window blinking under its vine, past the church and the yew-trees in the churchyard, to where the south gate made a delicate black pattern on the green grass.

These things appeared insubstantial, drawn back behind a sheet of air that shimmered over them like thin glass. They opened out, floated past and away from her; and instead of the high road and Park walls she saw a London street of dingy white façades, and instead of the south gate the swinging glass doors of Schnebler's Restaurant.

The glass doors swung open and she passed into the restaurant. The scene beat on her with the hard impact of reality: the white and gold panels, the white pillars and their curling gold capitals, the white circles of the tables, glittering, the flushed faces of the diners, moving mechanically.

She was driven forward by some irresistible compulsion to a table in the corner, where a man sat alone. The table napkin he was using hid his mouth, and jaw, and chest; and she was not sure of the upper part of the face above the straight, drawn edge. It dropped; and she saw Oscar Wade's face. She came to him, dragged, without power to resist; she sat down beside him, and he leaned to her over the table; she could feel the warmth of his red, congested face; the smell of wine floated towards her on his thick whisper.

"I knew you would come."

She ate and drank with him in silence, nibbling and sipping slowly, staving off the abominable moment it would end in.

At last they got up and faced each other. His long bulk stood before her, above her; she could almost feel the vibration of its power.

"Come," he said. "Come."

And she went before him, slowly, slipping out through the maze of the tables, hearing behind her Oscar's measured, deliberate, thoughtful tread. The steep, red-carpeted staircase rose up before her.

She swerved from it, but he turned her back.

"You know the way," he said.

At the top of the flight she found the white door of the room she knew. She knew the long windows guarded by drawn muslin blinds; the gilt looking-glass over the chimney-piece that reflected Oscar's head and shoulders grotesquely between two white porcelain babies with bulbous limbs and garlanded loins, she knew the sprawling stain on the drab carpet by the table, the shabby, infamous couch behind the screen.

They moved about the room, turning and turning in it like beasts in a cage, uneasy, inimical, avoiding each other.

At last they stood still, he at the window, she at the door, the length of the room between.

"It's no good your getting away like that," he said. "There couldn't be any other end to it—to what we did."

"But that *was* ended."

"Ended there, but not here."

"Ended for ever. We've done with it for ever."

"We haven't. We've got to begin again. And go on. And go on."

"Oh, no. No. Anything but that."

"There isn't anything else."

"We can't. We can't. Don't you remember how it bored us?"

"Remember? Do you suppose I'd touch you if I could help it? . . . That's what we're here for. We must. We must."

"No. No. I shall get away—now."

She turned to the door to open it.

"You can't," he said. "The door's locked."

"Oscar—what did you do that for?"

"We always did it. Don't you remember?"

She turned to the door again and shook it; she beat on it with her hands.

"It's no use, Harriott. If you got out now you'd only have to come back again. You might stave it off for an hour or so, but what's that in an immortality?"

"Immortality?"

"That's what we're in for."

"Time enough to talk about immortality when we're dead. . . . Ah——"

They were being drawn towards each other across the room, moving slowly, like figures in some monstrous and appalling dance, their heads thrown back over their shoulders, their faces turned from the horrible approach. Their arms rose slowly, heavy with intolerable reluctance; they stretched them out towards each other, aching, as if they held up an overpowering weight. Their feet dragged and were drawn.

Suddenly her knees sank under her; she shut her eyes; all her being went down before him in darkness and terror.

It was over. She had got away, she was going back, back, to the green drive of the Park, between the beech trees, where Oscar had never been, where he would never find her. When she passed through the south gate her memory became suddenly young and clean. She forgot the rue de Rivoli and the Hotel Saint Pierre; she forgot Schnebler's Restaurant and the room at the top of the stairs. She was back in her youth. She was Harriott Leigh going to wait for Stephen Philpotts in the pavilion opposite the west gate. She could feel herself, a slender figure moving fast over the grass between the lines of the great beech trees. The freshness of her youth was upon her.

She came to the heart of the drive where it branched right and left in the form of a cross. At the end of the right arm the white Greek temple, with its pediment and pillars, gleamed against the wood.

She was sitting on their seat at the back of the pavilion, watching the side door that Stephen would come in by.

The door was pushed open; he came towards her, light and young, skimming between the beech trees with his eager, tiptoeing stride. She rose up to meet him. She gave a cry.

"Stephen!"

It had been Stephen. She had seen him coming. But the man who stood before her between the pillars of the pavilion was Oscar Wade.

And now she was walking along the field-path that slanted from the orchard door to the stile; further and further back, to where young George Waring waited for her under the elder tree. The smell of the elder flowers came to her over the field. She could feel on her lips and in all her body the sweet, innocent excitement of her youth.

"George, oh, George?"

As she went along the field-path she had seen him. But the man who stood waiting for her under the elder tree was Oscar Wade.

"I told you it's no use getting away, Harriott. Every path brings you back to me. You'll find me at every turn."

"But how did you get *here*?"

"As I got into the pavilion. As I got into your father's room, on to his death bed. Because I *was* there. I am in all your memories."

"My memories are innocent. How could you take my father's place, and Stephen's, and George Waring's? You?"

"Because I did take them."

"Never. My love for *them* was innocent."

"Your love for me was part of it. You think the past affects the future. Has it never struck you that the future may affect the past? In your innocence there was the beginning of your sin. You *were* what you *were to be*."

"I shall get away," she said.

"And, this time, I shall go with you."

The stile, the elder tree, and the field floated away from her. She was going under the beech trees down the Park drive towards the south gate and the village, slinking close to the right-hand row of trees. She was aware that Oscar Wade was going with her under the left-hand row, keeping even with her, step by step, and tree by tree. And presently there was grey pavement under her feet and a row of grey pillars on her right hand. They were walking side by side down the rue de Rivoli towards the hotel.

They were sitting together now on the edge of the dingy white bed. Their arms hung by their sides, heavy and limp, their heads drooped, averted. Their passion weighed on them with the unbearable, unescapable boredom of immortality.

"Oscar—how long will it last?"

"I can't tell you. I don't know whether *this* is one moment of eternity, or the eternity of one moment."

"It must end some time," she said. "Life doesn't go on for ever. We shall die."

"Die? We *have* died. Don't you know what this is? Don't you know where you are? This is death. We're dead, Harriott. We're in hell."

"Yes. There can't be anything worse than this."

"This isn't the worst. We're not quite dead yet, as long as we've life in us to turn and run and get away from each other; as long as we can escape into our memories. But when you've got back to the farthest memory of all and there's nothing beyond it—When there's no memory but this—"

"In the last hell we shall not run away any longer; we shall find no more roads, no more passages, no more open doors. We shall have no need to look for each other.

"In the last death we shall be shut up in this room, behind that locked door, together. We shall lie here together, for ever and ever, joined so fast that even God can't put us asunder. We shall be one flesh and one spirit, one sin repeated for ever, and ever; spirit loathing flesh, flesh loathing spirit; you and I loathing each other."

"Why? Why?" she cried.

"Because that's all that's left us. That's what you made of love."

The darkness came down swamping, it blotted out the room. She was walk-

ing along a garden path between high borders of phlox and larkspur and lupin. They were taller than she was, their flowers swayed and nodded above her head. She tugged at the tall stems and had no strength to break them. She was a little thing.

She said to herself then that she was safe. She had gone back so far that she was a child again; she had the blank innocence of childhood. To be a child, to go small under the heads of the lupins, to be blank and innocent, without memory, was to be safe.

The walk led her out through a yew hedge on to a bright green lawn. In the middle of the lawn there was a shallow round pond in a ring of rockery cushioned with small flowers, yellow and white and purple. Gold-fish swam in the olive brown water. She would be safe when she saw the gold-fish swimming towards her. The old one with the white scales would come up first, pushing up his nose, making bubbles in the water.

At the bottom of the lawn there was a privet hedge cut by a broad path that went through the orchard. She knew what she would find there; her mother was in the orchard. She would lift her up in her arms to play with the hard red balls of the apples that hung from the tree. She had got back to the farthest memory of all; there was nothing beyond it.

There would be an iron gate in the wall of the orchard. It would lead into a field.

Something was different here, something that frightened her. An ash-grey door instead of an iron gate.

She pushed it open and came into the last corridor of the Hotel Saint Pierre.

J. Sheridan Le Fanu

GREEN TEA

from In a Glass Darkly

Bentley, 1872

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Prologue

MARTIN HESSELIUS, THE GERMAN PHYSICIAN

Though carefully educated in medicine and surgery, I have never practised either. The study of each continues, nevertheless, to interest me profoundly. Neither idleness nor caprice caused my secession from the honourable calling which I had just entered. The cause was a very trifling scratch inflicted by a

dissecting knife. This trifle cost me the loss of two fingers, amputated promptly, and the more painful loss of my health, for I have never been quite well since, and have seldom been twelve months together in the same place.

In my wanderings I became acquainted with Dr. Martin Hesselius, a wanderer like myself, like me a physician, and like me an enthusiast in his profession. Unlike me in this, that his wanderings were voluntary, and he a man, if not of fortune, as we estimate fortune in England, at least in what our forefathers used to term "easy circumstances." He was an old man when I first saw him; nearly five-and-thirty years my senior.

In Dr. Martin Hesselius, I found my master. His knowledge was immense, his grasp of a case was an intuition. He was the very man to inspire a young enthusiast, like me, with awe and delight. My admiration has stood the test of time and survived the separation of death. I am sure it was well-founded.

For nearly twenty years I acted as his medical secretary. His immense collection of papers he has left in my care, to be arranged, indexed and bound. His treatment of some of these cases is curious. He writes in two distinct characters. He describes what he saw and heard as an intelligent layman might, and when in this style of narrative he had seen the patient either through his own hall-door, to the light of day, or through the gates of darkness to the caverns of the dead, he returns upon the narrative, and in the terms of his art, and with all the force and originality of genius, proceeds to the work of analysis, diagnosis and illustration.

Here and there a case strikes me as of a kind to amuse or horrify a lay reader with an interest quite different from the peculiar one which it may possess for an expert. With slight modifications, chiefly of language, and of course a change of names, I copy the following. The narrator is Dr. Martin Hesselius. I find it among the voluminous notes of cases which he made during a tour in England about sixty-four years ago.

It is related in a series of letters to his friend Professor Van Loo of Leyden. The professor was not a physician, but a chemist, and a man who read history and metaphysics and medicine, and had, in his day, written a play.

The narrative is therefore, if somewhat less valuable as a medical record, necessarily written in a manner more likely to interest an unlearned reader.

These letters, from a memorandum attached, appear to have been returned on the death of the professor, in 1819, to Dr. Hesselius. They are written, some in English, some in French, but the greater part in German. I am a faithful, though, I am conscious, by no means a graceful translator, and although here and there I omit some passages, and shorten others, and disguise names, I have interpolated nothing.

Chapter 1

DR. HESSELIUS RELATES HOW HE MET THE REV. MR. JENNINGS

The Rev. Mr. Jennings is tall and thin. He is middle-aged, and dresses with a natty, old-fashioned, high-church precision. He is naturally a little stately, but not at all stiff. His features, without being handsome, are well formed, and their expression extremely kind, but also shy.

I met him one evening at Lady Mary Heyduke's. The modesty and benevolence of his countenance are extremely prepossessing.

We were but a small party, and he joined agreeably enough in the conversation. He seems to enjoy listening very much more than contributing to the talk; but what he says is always to the purpose and well said. He is a great favourite of Lady Mary's, who it seems, consults him upon many things, and thinks him the most happy and blessed person on earth. Little knows she about him.

The Rev. Mr. Jennings is a bachelor, and has, they say, sixty thousand pounds in the funds. He is a charitable man. He is most anxious to be actively employed in his sacred profession, and yet though always tolerably well elsewhere, when he goes down to his vicarage in Warwickshire, to engage in the actual duties of his sacred calling, his health soon fails him, and in a very strange way. So says Lady Mary.

There is no doubt that Mr. Jennings' health does break down in, generally, a sudden and mysterious way, sometimes in the very act of officiating in his old and pretty church at Kenlis. It may be his heart, it may be his brain. But so it has happened three or four times, or oftener, that after proceeding a certain way in the service, he has on a sudden stopped short, and after a silence, apparently quite unable to resume, he has fallen into solitary, inaudible prayer, his hands and his eyes uplifted, and then pale as death, and in the agitation of a strange shame and horror, descended trembling, and got into the vestry-room, leaving his congregation, without explanation, to themselves. This occurred when his curate was absent. When he goes down to Kenlis now, he always takes care to provide a clergyman to share his duty, and to supply his place on the instant should he become thus suddenly incapacitated.

When Mr. Jennings breaks down quite, and beats a retreat from the vicarage, and returns to London, where, in a dark street off Piccadilly, he inhabits a very narrow house, Lady Mary says that he is always perfectly well. I have my own opinion about that. There are degrees of course. We shall see.

Mr. Jennings is a perfectly gentlemanlike man. People, however, remark something odd. There is an impression a little ambiguous. One thing which certainly contributes to it, people, I think, don't remember; or, perhaps, distinctly remark. But I did, almost immediately. Mr. Jennings has a way of looking sidelong upon the carpet, as if his eye followed the movements of something there. This, of course, is not always. It occurs only now and then. But often enough to give a

certain oddity, as I have said, to his manner, and in this glance travelling along the floor there is something both shy and anxious.

A medical philosopher, as you are good enough to call me, elaborating theories by the aid of cases sought out by himself, and by him watched and scrutinised with more time at command, and consequently infinitely more minuteness than the ordinary practitioner can afford, falls insensibly into habits of observation, which accompany him everywhere, and are exercised, as some people would say, impertinently, upon every subject that presents itself with the least likelihood of rewarding inquiry.

There was a promise of this kind in the slight, timid, kindly, but reserved gentleman, whom I met for the first time at this agreeable little evening gathering. I observed, of course, more than I here set down; but I reserve all that borders on the technical for a strictly scientific paper.

I may remark, that when I here speak of medical science, I do so, as I hope some day to see it more generally understood, in a much more comprehensive sense than its generally material treatment would warrant. I believe the entire natural world is but the ultimate expression of that spiritual world from which, and in which alone, it has its life. I believe that the essential man is a spirit, that the spirit is an organised substance, but as different in point of material from what we ordinarily understand by matter, as light or electricity is; that the material body is, in the most literal sense, a vesture, and death consequently no interruption of the living man's existence, but simply his extrication from the natural body—a process which commences at the moment of what we term death, and the completion of which, at furthest a few days later, is the resurrection "in power."

The person who weighs the consequences of these positions will probably see their practical bearing upon medical science. This is, however, by no means the proper place for displaying the proofs and discussing the consequences of this too generally unrecognized state of facts.

In pursuance of my habit, I was covertly observing Mr. Jennings, with all my caution—I think he perceived it—and I saw plainly that he was as cautiously observing me. Lady Mary happening to address me by my name, as Dr. Hesselius, I saw that he glanced at me more sharply, and then became thoughtful for a few minutes.

After this, as I conversed with a gentleman at the other end of the room, I saw him look at me more steadily, and with an interest which I thought I understood. I then saw him take an opportunity of chatting with Lady Mary, and was, as one always is, perfectly aware of being the subject of a distant inquiry and answer.

This tall clergyman approached me by-and-by; and in a little time we had got into conversation. When two people, who like reading, and know books and places, have travelled, wish to discourse, it is very strange if they can't find topics. It was not accident that brought him near me, and led him into conversation. He knew German, and had read my Essays on Metaphysical Medicine which suggest more than they actually say.

This courteous man, gentle, shy, plainly a man of thought and reading, who moving and talking among us, was not altogether of us, and whom I already suspected of leading a life whose transactions and alarms were carefully concealed, with an impenetrable reserve from, not only the world, but his best beloved friends—was cautiously weighing in his own mind the idea of taking a certain step with regard to me.

I penetrated his thoughts without his being aware of it, and was careful to say nothing which could betray to his sensitive vigilance my suspicions respecting his position, or my surmises about his plans respecting myself.

We chatted upon indifferent subjects for a time but at last he said:

"I was very much interested by some papers of yours, Dr. Hesselius, upon what you term Metaphysical Medicine—I read them in German, ten or twelve years ago—have they been translated?"

"No, I'm sure they have not—I should have heard. They would have asked my leave, I think."

"I asked the publishers here, a few months ago, to get the book for me in the original German; but they tell me it is out of print."

"So it is, and has been for some years; but it flatters me as an author to find that you have not forgotten my little book, although," I added, laughing, "ten or twelve years is a considerable time to have managed without it; but I suppose you have been turning the subject over again in your mind, or something has happened lately to revive your interest in it."

At this remark, accompanied by a glance of inquiry, a sudden embarrassment disturbed Mr. Jennings, analogous to that which makes a young lady blush and look foolish. He dropped his eyes, and folded his hands together uneasily, and looked oddly, and you would have said, guiltily, for a moment.

I helped him out of his awkwardness in the best way, by appearing not to observe it, and going straight on, I said: "Those revivals of interest in a subject happen to me often; one book suggests another, and often sends me back a wild-goose chase over an interval of twenty years. But if you still care to possess a copy, I shall be only too happy to provide you; I have still got two or three by me—and if you allow me to present one I shall be very much honoured."

"You are very good indeed," he said, quite at his ease again, in a moment: "I almost despaired—I don't know how to thank you."

"Pray don't say a word; the thing is really so little worth that I am only ashamed of having offered it, and if you thank me any more I shall throw it into the fire in a fit of modesty."

Mr. Jennings laughed. He inquired where I was staying in London, and after a little more conversation on a variety of subjects, he took his departure.

Chapter 2

THE DOCTOR QUESTIONS LADY MARY, AND SHE ANSWERS

"I like your vicar so much, Lady Mary," said I, as soon as he was gone. "He has read, travelled, and thought, and having also suffered, he ought to be an accomplished companion."

"So he is, and, better still, he is a really good man," said she. "His advice is invaluable about my schools, and all my little undertakings at Dawlbridge, and he's so painstaking, he takes so much trouble—you have no idea—wherever he thinks he can be of use: he's so good-natured and so sensible."

"It is pleasant to hear so good an account of his neighbourly virtues. I can only testify to his being an agreeable and gentle companion, and in addition to what you have told me, I think I can tell you two or three things about him," said I.

"Really!"

"Yes, to begin with, he's unmarried."

"Yes, that's right—go on."

"He has been writing, that is he *was*, but for two or three years perhaps, he has not gone on with his work, and the book was upon some rather abstract subject—perhaps theology."

"Well, he was writing a book, as you say; I'm not quite sure what it was about, but only that it was nothing that I cared for; very likely you are right, and he certainly did stop—yes."

"And although he only drank a little coffee here to-night, he likes tea, at least, did like it, extravagantly."

"Yes, that's *quite* true."

"He drank green tea, a good deal, didn't he?" I pursued.

"Well, that's very odd! Green tea was a subject on which we used almost to quarrel."

"But he has quite given that up," said I.

"So he has."

"And, now, one more fact. His mother or his father, did you know them?"

"Yes, both; his father is only ten years dead, and their place is near Dawlbridge. We knew them very well," she answered.

"Well, either his mother or his father—I should rather think his father, saw a ghost," said I.

"Well, you are really a conjurer, Dr. Hesselius."

"Conjurer or no, haven't I said right?" I answered merrily.

"You certainly have, and it *was* his father: he was a silent, whimsical man, and he used to bore my father about his dreams, and at last he told him a story about a ghost he had seen and talked with, and a very odd story it was. I remember it particularly, because I was so afraid of him. This story was long before he died—when I was quite a child—and his ways were so silent and moping,

and he used to drop in sometimes, in the dusk, when I was alone in the drawing-room, and I used to fancy there where ghosts about him."

I smiled and nodded.

"And now, having established my character as a conjurer, I think I must say good-night," said I.

"But how *did* you find it out?"

"By the planets, of course, as the gipsies do," I answered, and so, gaily, we said good-night.

Next morning I sent the little book he had been enquiring after, and a note to Mr. Jennings, and on returning late that evening, I found that he had called at my lodgings, and left his card. He asked whether I was at home, and asked at what hour he would be most likely to find me.

Does he intend opening his case, and consulting me "professionally," as they say. I hope so. I have already conceived a theory about him. It is supported by Lady Mary's answers to my parting questions. I should like much to ascertain from his own lips. But what can I do consistently with good breeding to invite a confession? Nothing. I rather think he meditates one. At all events, my dear Van L., I shan't make myself difficult of access; I mean to return his visit to-morrow. It will be only civil in return for his politeness, to ask to see him. Perhaps something may come of it. Whether much, little, or nothing, my dear Van L., you shall hear.

Chapter 3

DR. HESSELIUS PICKS UP SOMETHING IN LATIN BOOKS

Well, I have called at Blank Street.

On enquiring at the door, the servant told me that Mr. Jennings was engaged very particularly with a gentleman, a clergyman from Kenlis, his parish in the country. Intending to reserve my privilege, and to call again, I merely intimated that I should try another time, and had turned to go, when the servant begged my pardon, and asked me, looking at me a little more attentively than well-bred persons of his order usually do, whether I was Dr. Hesselius; and, on learning that I was, he said, "Perhaps then, sir, you would allow me to mention it to Mr. Jennings, for I am sure he wishes to see you."

The servant returned in a moment, with a message from Mr. Jennings, asking me to go into his study, which was in effect his back drawing-room, promising to be with me in a very few minutes.

This was really a study—almost a library. The room was lofty, with two tall, slender windows, and rich dark curtains. It was much larger than I had expected, and stored with books on every side, from the floor to the ceiling. The upper carpet—for to my tread it felt that there were two or three—was a Turkey carpet. My steps fell noiselessly. The book-cases standing out, placed the windows, particularly narrow ones, in deep recesses. The effect of the room was, although extremely comfortable, and even luxurious, decidedly gloomy, and aided by the

silence, almost oppressive. Perhaps, however, I ought to have allowed something for association. My mind had connected peculiar ideas with Mr. Jennings. I stepped into this perfectly silent room, of a very silent house, with a peculiar foreboding; and its darkness, and solemn clothing of books, for except where two narrow looking-glasses were set in the wall, they were everywhere, helped this sombre feeling.

While awaiting Mr. Jennings' arrival, I amused myself by looking into some of the books with which his shelves were laden. Not among these, but immediately under them, with their backs upward, on the floor, I lighted upon a complete set of Swedenborg's *Arcana Cœlestia*, in the original Latin, a very fine folio set, bound in the natty livery which theology affects, pure vellum, namely, gold letters, and carmine edges. There were paper markers in several of these volumes. I raised and placed them, one after the other, upon the table, and opening where these papers were placed, I read in the solemn Latin phraseology, a series of sentences indicated by a pencilled line at the margin. Of these I copy here a few, translating them into English.

"When man's interior sight is opened, which is that of his spirit, then there appear the things of another life, which cannot possibly be made visible to the bodily sight. . . ."

"By the internal sight it has been granted me to see the things that are in the other life, more clearly than I see those that are in the world. From these considerations, it is evident that external vision exists from interior vision, and this from a vision still more interior, and so on. . . ."

"There are with every man at least two evil spirits. . . ."

"With wicked genii there is also a fluent speech, but harsh and grating. There is also among them a speech which is not fluent, wherein the dissent of the thoughts is perceived as something secretly creeping along within it."

"The evil spirits associated with man are, indeed from the hells, but when with man they are not then in hell, but are taken out thence. The place where they then are, is in the midst between heaven and hell, and is called the world of spirits—when the evil spirits who are with man, are in that world, they are not in any infernal torment, but in every thought and affection of the man, and so, in all that the man himself enjoys. But when they are remitted into their hell, they return to their former state. . . ."

"If evil spirits could perceive that they were associated with man, and yet that they were spirits separate from him, and if they could flow into the things of his body, they would attempt by a thousand means to destroy him; for they hate man with a deadly hatred. . . ."

"Knowing, therefore, that I was a man in the body, they were continually striving to destroy me, not as to the body only, but especially as to the soul; for to destroy any man or spirit is the very delight of the life of all who are in hell; but I have been continually protected by the Lord. Hence it appears how dangerous it is for man to be in a living consort with spirits, unless he be in the good of faith. . . ."

"Nothing is more carefully guarded from the knowledge of associate spirits

than their being thus conjoint with a man, for if they knew it they would speak to him, with the intention to destroy him. . . ."

"The delight of hell is to do evil to man, and to hasten his eternal ruin."

A long note, written with a very sharp and fine pencil, in Mr. Jennings' neat hand, at the foot of the page, caught my eye. Expecting his criticism upon the text, I read a word or two, and stopped, for it was something quite different, and began with these words, *Deus misereatur mei*—"May God compassionate me." Thus warned of its private nature, I averted my eyes, and shut the book, replacing all the volumes as I had found them, except one which interested me, and in which, as men studious and solitary in their habits will do, I grew so absorbed as to take no cognisance of the outer world, nor to remember where I was.

I was reading some pages which refer to "representatives" and "correspondents," in the technical language of Swedenborg, and had arrived at a passage, the substance of which is, that evil spirits, when seen by other eyes than those of their infernal associates, present themselves, by "correspondence," in the shape of the beast (*fera*) which represents their particular lust and life, in aspect direful and atrocious. This is a long passage, and particularises a number of those bestial forms.

Chapter 4

FOUR EYES WERE READING THE PASSAGE

I was running the head of my pencil-case along the line as I read it, and something caused me to raise my eyes.

Directly before me was one of the mirrors I have mentioned, in which I saw reflected the tall shape of my friend, Mr. Jennings, leaning over my shoulder, and reading the page at which I was busy, and with a face so dark and wild that I should hardly have known him.

I turned and rose. He stood erect also, and with an effort laughed a little, saying:

"I came in and asked you how you did, but without succeeding in awakening you from your book; so I could not restrain my curiosity, and very impertinently, I'm afraid, peeped over your shoulder. This is not your first time of looking into those pages. You have looked into Swedenborg, no doubt, long ago?"

"Oh dear, yes! I owe Swedenborg a great deal; you will discover traces of him in the little book on Metaphysical Medicine, which you were so good as to remember."

Although my friend affected a gaiety of manner, there was a slight flush in his face, and I could perceive that he was inwardly much perturbed.

"I'm scarcely yet qualified, I know so little of Swedenborg. I've only had them a fortnight," he answered, "and I think they are rather likely to make a solitary man nervous—that is, judging from the very little I have read—I don't say that

they have made me so," he laughed; "and I'm so very much obliged for the book. I hope you got my note?"

I made all proper acknowledgments and modest disclaimers.

"I never read a book that I go with, so entirely, as that of yours," he continued. "I saw at once there is more in it than is quite unfolded. Do you know Dr. Harley?" he asked, rather abruptly.

In passing, the editor remarks that the physician here named was one of the most eminent who had ever practised in England.

I did, having had letters to him, and had experienced from him great courtesy and considerable assistance during my visit to England.

"I think that man one of the very greatest fools I ever met in my life," said Mr. Jennings.

This was the first time I had ever heard him say a sharp thing of anybody, and such a term applied to so high a name a little startled me.

"Really! and in what way?" I asked.

"In his profession," he answered.

I smiled.

"I mean this," he said: "he seems to me, one half, blind—I mean one half of all he looks at is dark—preternaturally bright and vivid all the rest; and the worst of it is, it seems *wilful*. I can't get him—I mean he won't—I've had some experience of him as a physician, but I look on him as, in that sense, no better than a paralytic mind, an intellect half dead. I'll tell you—I know I shall some time—all about it," he said, with a little agitation. "You stay some months longer in England. If I should be out of town during your stay for a little time, would you allow me to trouble you with a letter."

"I should be only too happy," I assured him.

"Very good of you. I am so utterly dissatisfied with Harley."

"A little leaning to the materialistic school," I said.

"A *mere* materialist," he corrected me; "you can't think how that sort of thing worries one who knows better. You won't tell any one—any of my friends who know—that I am hippish; now, for instance, no one knows—not even Lady Mary—that I have seen Dr. Harley, or any other doctor. So pray don't mention it; and, if I should have any threatening of an attack, you'll kindly let me write, or, should I be in town, have a little talk with you."

I was full of conjecture, and unconsciously I found I had fixed my eyes gravely on him, for he lowered his for a moment, and he said:

"I see you think I might as well tell you now, or else you are forming a conjecture; but you may as well give it up. If you were guessing all the rest of your life, you will never hit on it."

He shook his head smiling, and over that wintry sunshine a black cloud suddenly came down, and he drew his breath in through his teeth, as men do in pain.

"Sorry, of course, to learn that you apprehend occasion to consult any of us; but command me when and how you like, and I need not assure you that your confidence is sacred."

He then talked of quite other things, and in a comparatively cheerful way and after a little time, I took my leave.

Chapter 5

DOCTOR HESSELIUS IS SUMMONED TO RICHMOND

We parted cheerfully, but he was not cheerful, nor was I. There are certain expressions of that powerful organ of spirit—the human face—which, although I have seen them often, and possess a doctor's nerve, yet disturb me profoundly. One look of Mr. Jennings haunted me. It had seized my imagination with so dismal a power that I changed my plans for the evening, and went to the opera, feeling that I wanted a change of ideas.

I heard nothing of or from him for two or three days, when a note in his hand reached me. It was cheerful, and full of hope. He said that he had been for some little time so much better—quite well, in fact—that he was going to make a little experiment, and run down for a month or so to his parish, to try whether a little work might not quite set him up. There was in it a fervent religious expression of gratitude for his restoration, as he now almost hoped he might call it.

A day or two later I saw Lady Mary, who repeated what his note had announced, and told me that he was actually in Warwickshire, having resumed his clerical duties at Kenlis; and she added, "I begin to think that he is really perfectly well, and that there never was anything the matter, more than nerves and fancy; we are all nervous, but I fancy there is nothing like a little hard work for that kind of weakness, and he has made up his mind to try it. I should not be surprised if he did not come back for a year."

Notwithstanding all this confidence, only two days later I had this note, dated from his house off Piccadilly:

> "Dear Sir,—I have returned disappointed. If I should feel at all able to see you, I shall write to ask you kindly to call. At present, I am too low, and, in fact, simply unable to say all I wish to say. Pray don't mention my name to my friends. I can see no one. By-and-by, please God, you shall hear from me. I mean to take a run into Shropshire, where some of my people are. God bless you! May we, on my return, meet more happily than I can now write."

About a week after this I saw Lady Mary at her own house, the last person, she said, left in town, and just on the wing for Brighton, for the London season was quite over. She told me that she had heard from Mr. Jennings' niece, Martha, in Shropshire. There was nothing to be gathered from her letter, more than that he was low and nervous. In those words, of which healthy people think so lightly, what a world of suffering is sometimes hidden!

Nearly five weeks had passed without any further news of Mr. Jennings. At the end of that time I received a note from him. He wrote:

"I have been in the country, and have had change of air, change of scene, change of faces, change of everything and in everything—but *myself*. I have made up my mind, so far as the most irresolute creature on earth can do it, to tell my case fully to you. If your engagements will permit, pray come to me to-day, to-morrow, or the next day; but, pray defer as little as possible. You know not how much I need help. I have a quiet house at Richmond, where I now am. Perhaps you can manage to come to dinner, or to luncheon, or even to tea. You shall have no trouble in finding me out. The servant at Blank Street, who takes this note, will have a carriage at your door at any hour you please; and I am always to be found. You will say that I ought not to be alone. I have tried everything. Come and see."

I called up the servant, and decided on going out the same evening, which accordingly I did.

He would have been much better in a lodging-house, or hotel, I thought, as I drove up through a short double row of sombre elms to a very old-fashioned brick house, darkened by the foliage of these trees, which overtopped, and nearly surrounded it. It was a perverse choice, for nothing could be imagined more triste and silent. The house, I found, belonged to him. He had stayed for a day or two in town, and, finding it for some cause insupportable, had come out here, probably because being furnished and his own, he was relieved of the thought and delay of selection, by coming here.

The sun had already set, and the red reflected light of the western sky illuminated the scene with the peculiar effect with which we are all familiar. The hall seemed very dark, but, getting to the back drawing-room, whose windows commanded the west, I was again in the same dusky light.

I sat down, looking out upon the richly-wooded landscape that glowed in the grand and melancholy light which was every moment fading. The corners of the room were already dark; all was growing dim, and the gloom was insensibly toning my mind, already prepared for what was sinister. I was waiting alone for his arrival, which soon took place. The door communicating with the front room opened, and the tall figure of Mr. Jennings, faintly seen in the ruddy twilight, came, with quiet stealthy steps, into the room.

We shook hands, and, taking a chair to the window, where there was still light enough to enable us to see each other's faces, he sat down beside me, and, placing his hand upon my arm, with scarcely a word of preface began his narrative.

Chapter 6

How Mr. Jennings Met His Companion

The faint glow of the west, the pomp of the then lonely woods of Richmond, were before us, behind and about us the darkening room, and on the stony face of the sufferer—for the character of his face, though still gentle and sweet, was

changed—rested that dim, odd glow which seems to descend and produce, where it touches, lights, sudden though faint, which are lost, almost without gradation, in darkness. The silence, too, was utter; not a distant wheel, or bark, or whistle from without; and within the depressing stillness of an invalid bachelor's house.

I guessed well the nature, though not even vaguely the particulars of the revelations I was about to receive, from that fixed face of suffering that so oddly flushed stood out, like a portrait of Schalken's, before its background of darkness.

"It began," he said, "on the 15th of October, three years and eleven weeks ago, and two days—I keep very accurate count, for every day is torment. If I leave anywhere a chasm in my narrative tell me.

"About four years ago I began a work, which had cost me very much thought and reading. It was upon the religious metaphysics of the ancients."

"I know," said I, "the actual religion of educated and thinking paganism, quite apart from symbolic worship? A wide and very interesting field."

"Yes; but not good for the mind—the Christian mind, I mean. Paganism is all bound together in essential unity, and, with evil sympathy, their religion involves their art, and both their manners, and the subject is a degrading fascination and the Nemesis sure. God forgive me!

"I wrote a great deal; I wrote late at night. I was always thinking on the subject, walking about, wherever I was, everywhere. It thoroughly infected me. You are to remember that all the material ideas connected with it were more or less of the beautiful, the subject itself delightfully interesting, and I, then, without a care."

He sighed heavily.

"I believe that every one who sets about writing in earnest does his work, as a friend of mine phrased it, *on* something—tea, or coffee, or tobacco. I suppose there is a material waste that must be hourly supplied in such occupations, or that we should grow too abstracted, and the mind, as it were, pass out of the body, unless it were reminded often of the connection by actual sensation. At all events, I felt the want, and I supplied it. Tea was my companion—at first the ordinary black tea, made in the usual way, not too strong; but I drank a good deal, and increased its strength as I went on. I never experienced an uncomfortable symptom from it. I began to take a little green tea. I found the effect pleasanter, it cleared and intensified the power of thought so. I had come to take it frequently, but not stronger than one might take it for pleasure. I wrote a great deal out here, it was so quiet, and in this room. I used to sit up very late, and it became a habit with me to sip my tea—green tea—every now and then as my work proceeded. I had a little kettle on my table, that swung over a lamp, and made tea two or three times between eleven o'clock and two or three in the morning, my hours of going to bed. I used to go into town every day. I was not a monk, and, although I spent an hour or two in a library hunting up authorities and looking out lights upon my theme, I was in no morbid state as far as I can judge. I met my friends pretty much as usual and enjoyed their society, and, on the whole, existence had never been, I think, so pleasant before.

"I had met with a man who had some odd old books, German editions in

mediæval Latin, and I was only too happy to be permitted access to them. This obliging person's books were in the City, a very out-of-the-way part of it. I had rather out-stayed my intended hour, and, on coming out, seeing no cab near, I was tempted to get into the omnibus which used to drive past this house. It was darker than this by the time the 'bus had reached an old house, you may have remarked, with four poplars at each side of the door, and there the last passenger but myself got out. We drove along rather faster. It was twilight now. I leaned back in my corner next the door ruminating pleasantly.

"The interior of the omnibus was nearly dark. I had observed in the corner opposite to me at the other side, and at the end next the horses, two small circular reflections, as it seemed to me of a reddish light. They were about two inches apart, and about the size of those small brass buttons that yachting men used to put upon their jackets. I began to speculate, as listless men will, upon this trifle, as it seemed. From what centre did that faint but deep red light come, and from what—glass beads, buttons, toy decorations—was it reflected? We were lumbering along gently, having nearly a mile still to go. I had not solved the puzzle, and it became in another minute more odd, for these two luminous points, with a sudden jerk, descended nearer the floor, keeping still their relative distance and horizontal position, and then, as suddenly, they rose to the level of the seat on which I was sitting and I saw them no more.

"My curiosity was now really excited, and before I had time to think, I saw again these two dull lamps, again together near the floor; again they disappeared, and again in their old corner I saw them.

"So, keeping my eyes upon them, I edged quietly up my own side, towards the end at which I still saw these tiny discs of red.

"There was very little light in the 'bus. It was nearly dark. I leaned forward to aid my endeavour to discover what these little circles really were. They shifted their position a little as I did so. I began now to perceive an outline of something black, and I soon saw, with tolerable distinctness, the outline of a small black monkey, pushing its face forward in mimicry to meet mine; those were its eyes, and I now dimly saw its teeth grinning at me.

"I drew back, not knowing whether it might not meditate a spring. I fancied that one of the passengers had forgot this ugly pet, and wishing to ascertain something of its temper, though not caring to trust my fingers to it, I poked my umbrella softly towards it. It remained immovable—up to it—*through* it. For through it, and back and forward it passed, without the slightest resistance.

"I can't, in the least, convey to you the kind of horror that I felt. When I had ascertained that the thing was an illusion, as I then supposed, there came a misgiving about myself and a terror that fascinated me in impotence to remove my gaze from the eyes of the brute for some moments. As I looked, it made a little skip back, quite into the corner, and I, in a panic, found myself at the door, having put my head out, drawing deep breaths of the outer air, and staring at the lights and trees we were passing, too glad to reassure myself of reality.

"I stopped the 'bus and got out. I perceived the man look oddly at me as I

paid him. I daresay there was something unusual in my looks and manner, for I had never felt so strangely before."

Chapter 7

THE JOURNEY: FIRST STAGE

"When the omnibus drove on, and I was alone upon the road, I looked carefully round to ascertain whether the monkey had followed me. To my indescribable relief I saw it nowhere. I can't describe easily what a shock I had received, and my sense of genuine gratitude on finding myself, as I supposed, quite rid of it.

"I had got out a little before we reached this house, two or three hundred steps. A brick wall runs along the footpath, and inside the wall is a hedge of yew, or some dark evergreen of that kind, and within that again the row of fine trees which you may have remarked as you came.

"This brick wall is about as high as my shoulder, and happening to raise my eyes I saw the monkey, with that stooping gait, on all fours, walking or creeping, close beside me on top of the wall. I stopped, looking at it with a feeling of loathing and horror. As I stopped so did it. It sat up on the wall with its long hands on its knees looking at me. There was not light enough to see it much more than in outline, nor was it dark enough to bring the peculiar light of its eyes into strong relief. I still saw, however, that red foggy light plainly enough. It did not show its teeth, nor exhibit any sign of irritation, but seemed jaded and sulky, and was observing me steadily.

"I drew back into the middle of the road. It was an unconscious recoil, and there I stood, still looking at it. It did not move.

"With an instinctive determination to try something—anything, I turned about and walked briskly towards town with askance look, all the time, watching the movements of the beast. It crept swiftly along the wall, at exactly my pace.

"Where the wall ends, near the turn of the road, it came down, and with a wiry spring or two brought itself close to my feet, and continued to keep up with me, as I quickened my pace. It was at my left side, so close to my leg that I felt every moment as if I should tread upon it.

"The road was quite deserted and silent, and it was darker every moment. I stopped dismayed and bewildered, turning as I did so, the other way—I mean, towards this house, away from which I had been walking. When I stood still, the monkey drew back to a distance of, I suppose, about five or six yards, and remained stationary, watching me.

"I had been more agitated than I have said. I had read, of course, as every one has, something about 'spectral illusions,' as you physicians term the phenomena of such cases. I considered my situation, and looked my misfortune in the face.

"These affections, I had read, are sometimes transitory and sometimes obstinate. I had read of cases in which the appearance, at first harmless, had, step by

step, degenerated into something direful and insupportable, and ended by wearing its victim out. Still as I stood there, but for my bestial companion, quite alone, I tried to comfort myself by repeating again and again the assurance, 'the thing is purely disease, a well-known physical affection, as distinctly as small-pox or neuralgia. Doctors are all agreed on that, philosophy demonstrates it. I must not be a fool. I've been sitting up too late, and I daresay my digestion is quite wrong, and, with God's help, I shall be all right, and this is but a symptom of nervous dyspepsia.' Did I believe all this? Not one word of it, no more than any other miserable being ever did who is once seized and riveted in this satanic captivity. Against my convictions, I might say my knowledge, I was simply bullying myself into a false courage.

"I now walked homeward. I had only a few hundred yards to go. I had forced myself into a sort of resignation, but I had not got over the sickening shock and the flurry of the first certainty of my misfortune.

"I made up my mind to pass the night at home. The brute moved close beside me, and I fancied there was the sort of anxious drawing towards the house, which one sees in tired horses or dogs sometimes as they come toward home.

"I was afraid to go into town, I was afraid of any one's seeing and recognizing me. I was conscious of an irrepressible agitation in my manner. Also, I was afraid of any violent change in my habits, such as going to a place of amusement, or walking from home in order to fatigue myself. At the hall-door it waited till I mounted the steps, and when the door was opened entered with me.

"I drank no tea that night. I got cigars and some brandy and water. My idea was that I should act upon my material system, and by living for a while in sensation apart from thought, send myself forcibly, as it were, into a new groove. I came up here to this drawing-room. I sat just here. The monkey then got upon a small table that then stood *there*. It looked dazed and languid. An irrepressible uneasiness as to its movements kept my eyes always upon it. Its eyes were half closed, but I could see them glow. It was looking steadily at me. In all situations, at all hours, it is awake and looking at me. That never changes.

"I shall not continue in detail my narrative of this particular night. I shall describe, rather, the phenomena of the first year, which never varied, essentially. I shall describe the monkey as it appeared in daylight. In the dark, as you shall presently hear, there are peculiarities. It is a small monkey, perfectly black. It had only one peculiarity—a character of malignity—unfathomable malignity. During the first year it looked sullen and sick. But this character of intense malice and vigilance was always underlying that surly languor. During all that time it acted as if on a plan of giving me as little trouble as was consistent with watching me. Its eyes were never off me. I have never lost sight of it, except in my sleep, light or dark, day or night, since it came here, excepting when it withdraws for some weeks at a time, unaccountably.

"In total dark it is visible as in daylight. I do not mean merely its eyes. It is *all* visible distinctly in a halo that resembles a glow of red embers, and which accompanies it in all its movements.

"When it leaves me for a time, it is always at night, in the dark, and in the

same way. It grows at first uneasy, and then furious, and then advances towards me, grinning and shaking, its paws clenched, and, at the same time, there comes the appearance of fire in the grate. I never have any fire. I can't sleep in the room where there is any, and it draws nearer and nearer to the chimney, quivering, it seems, with rage, and when its fury rises to the highest pitch, it springs into the grate, and up the chimney, and I see it no more.

"When first this happened, I thought I was released. I was now a new man. A day passed—a night—and no return, and a blessed week—a week—another week. I was always on my knees, Dr. Hesselius, always, thanking God and praying. A whole month passed of liberty, but on a sudden, it was with me again."

Chapter 8

THE SECOND STAGE

"It was with me, and the malice which before was torpid under a sullen exterior, was now active. It was perfectly unchanged in every other respect. This new energy was apparent in its activity and its looks, and soon in other ways.

"For a time, you will understand, the change was shown only in an increased vivacity, and an air of menace, as if it was always brooding over some atrocious plan. Its eyes, as before, were never off me."

"Is it here now?" I asked.

"No," he replied, "it has been absent exactly a fortnight and a day—fifteen days. It has sometimes been away so long as nearly two months, once for three. Its absence always exceeds a fortnight, although it may be but by a single day. Fifteen days having passed since I saw it last, it may return now at any moment."

"Is its return," I asked, "accompanied by any peculiar manifestation?"

"Nothing—no," he said. "It is simply with me again. On lifting my eyes from a book, or turning my head, I see it, as usual, looking at me, and then it remains, as before, for its appointed time. I have never told so much and so minutely before to any one."

I perceived that he was agitated, and looking like death, and he repeatedly applied his handkerchief to his forehead; I suggested that he might be tired, and told him that I would call, with pleasure, in the morning, but he said:

"No, if you don't mind hearing it all now. I have got so far, and I should prefer making one effort of it. When I spoke to Dr. Harley, I had nothing like so much to tell. You are a philosophic physician. You give spirit its proper rank. If this thing is real—"

He paused, looking at me with agitated enquiry.

"We can discuss it by-and-by, and very fully. I will give you all I think," I answered, after an interval.

"Well—very well. If it is anything real, I say, it is prevailing, little by little, and drawing me more interiorly into hell. Optic nerves, he talked of. Ah! well

—there are other nerves of communication. May God Almighty help me! You shall hear.

"Its power of action, I tell you, had increased. Its malice became, in a way, aggressive. About two years ago, some questions that were pending between me and the bishop having been settled, I went down to my parish in Warwickshire, anxious to find occupation in my profession. I was not prepared for what happened, although I have since thought I might have apprehended something like it. The reason of my saying so is this—"

He was beginning to speak with a great deal more effort and reluctance, and sighed often, and seemed at times nearly overcome. But at this time his manner was not agitated. It was more like that of a sinking patient, who has given himself up.

"Yes, but I will first tell you about Kenlis, my parish.

"It was with me when I left this place for Dawlbridge. It was my silent travelling companion, and it remained with me at the vicarage. When I entered on the discharge of my duties, another change took place. The thing exhibited an atrocious determination to thwart me. It was with me in the church—in the reading-desk—in the pulpit—within the communion rails. At last, it reached this extremity, that while I was reading to the congregation, it would spring upon the open book and squat there, so that I was unable to see the page. This happened more than once.

"I left Dawlbridge for a time. I placed myself in Dr. Harley's hands. I did everything he told me. He gave my case a great deal of thought. It interested him, I think. He seemed successful. For nearly three months I was perfectly free from a return. I began to think I was safe. With his full assent I returned to Dawlbridge.

"I travelled in a chaise. I was in good spirits. I was more—I was happy and grateful. I was returning, as I thought, delivered from a dreadful hallucination, to the scene of duties which I longed to enter upon. It was a beautiful sunny evening, everything looked serene and cheerful, and I was delighted. I remember looking out of the window to see the spire of my church at Kenlis among the trees, at the point where one has the earliest view of it. It is exactly where the little stream that bounds the parish passes under the road by a culvert, and where it emerges at the roadside, a stone with an old inscription is placed. As we passed this point, I drew my head in and sat down, and in the corner of the chaise was the monkey.

"For a moment I felt faint, and then quite wild with despair and horror. I called to the driver, and got out, and sat down at the roadside, and prayed to God silently for mercy. A despairing resignation supervened. My companion was with me as I re-entered the vicarage. The same persecution followed. After a short struggle I submitted, and soon left the place.

"I told you," he said, "that the beast had before this become in certain ways aggressive. I will explain a little. It seemed to be actuated by intense and increasing fury, whenever I said my prayers, or even meditated prayer. It amounted at last to a dreadful interruption. You will ask, how could a silent immaterial

phantom effect that? It was thus, whenever I meditated praying; it was always before me, and nearer and nearer.

"It used to spring on a table, on the back of a chair, on the chimney-piece, and slowly to swing itself from side to side, looking at me all the time. There is in its motion an indefinable power to dissipate thought, and to contract one's attention to that monotony, till the ideas shrink, as it were, to a point, and at last to nothing—and unless I had started up, and shook off the catalepsy, I have felt as if my mind were on the point of losing itself. There are other ways," he sighed heavily; "thus, for instance, while I pray with my eyes closed, it comes closer and closer, and I see it. I know it is not to be accounted for physically, but I do actually see it, though my lids are closed, and so it rocks my mind, as it were, and overpowers me, and I am obliged to rise from my knees. If you had ever yourself known this, you would be acquainted with desperation."

Chapter 9

THE THIRD STAGE

"I see, Dr. Hesselius, that you don't lose one word of my statement. I need not ask you to listen specially to what I am now going to tell you. They talk of the optic nerves, and of spectral illusions, as if the organ of sight was the only point assailable by the influences that have fastened upon me—I know better. For two years in my direful case that limitation prevailed. But as food is taken in softly at the lips, and then brought under the teeth, as the tip of the little finger caught in a mill crank will draw in the hand, and the arm, and the whole body, so the miserable mortal who has been once caught firmly by the end of the finest fibre of his nerve, is drawn in and in, by the enormous machinery of hell, until he is as I am. Yes, Doctor, as *I* am, for while I talk to you, and implore relief, I feel that my prayer is for the impossible, and my pleading with the inexorable."

I endeavoured to calm this visibly increasing agitation, and told him that he must not despair.

While we talked the night had overtaken us. The filmy moonlight was wide over the scene which the window commanded, and I said:

"Perhaps you would prefer having candles. This light, you know, is odd. I should wish you, as much as possible, under your usual conditions while I make my diagnosis, shall I call it—otherwise I don't care."

"All lights are the same to me," he said; "except when I read or write, I care not if night were perpetual. I am going to tell you what happened about a year ago. The thing began to speak to me."

"Speak! How do you mean—speak as a man does, do you mean?"

"Yes; speak in words and consecutive sentences, with perfect coherence and articulation; but there is a peculiarity. It is not like the tone of a human voice. It is not by my ears it reaches me—it comes like a singing through my head.

"This faculty, the power of speaking to me, will be my undoing. It won't let

me pray, it interrupts me with dreadful blasphemies. I dare not go on, I could not. Oh! Doctor, can the skill, and thought, and prayers of man avail me nothing!"

"You must promise me, my dear sir, not to trouble yourself with unnecessarily exciting thoughts; confine yourself strictly to narrative of *facts;* and recollect, above all, that even if the thing that infests you be, as you seem to suppose, a reality with an actual independent life and will, yet it can have no power to hurt you, unless it be given from above: its access to your senses depends mainly upon your physical condition—this is, under God, your comfort and reliance: we are all alike environed. It is only that in your case, the '*paries,*' the veil of the flesh, the screen, is a little out of repair, and sights and sounds are transmitted. We must enter on a new course, sir—be encouraged. I'll give to-night to the careful consideration of the whole case."

"You are very good, sir; you think it worth trying, you don't give me quite up; but, sir, you don't know, it is gaining such an influence over me: it orders me about, it is such a tyrant, and I'm growing so helpless. May God deliver me!"

"It orders you about—of course you mean by speech?"

"Yes, yes; it is always urging me to crimes, to injure others, or myself. You see, Doctor, the situation is urgent, it is indeed. When I was in Shropshire, a few weeks ago" (Mr. Jennings was speaking rapidly and trembling now, holding my arm with one hand, and looking in my face), "I went out one day with a party of friends for a walk: my persecutor, I tell you, was with me at the time. I lagged behind the rest: the country near the Dee, you know, is beautiful. Our path happened to lie near a coal mine, and at the verge of the wood is a perpendicular shaft, they say, a hundred and fifty feet deep. My niece had remained behind with me—she knows, of course, nothing of the nature of my sufferings. She knew, however, that I had been ill, and was low, and she remained to prevent my being quite alone. As we loitered slowly on together, the brute that accompanied me was urging me to throw myself down the shaft. I tell you now—oh, sir, think of it!—the one consideration that saved me from that hideous death was the fear lest the shock of witnessing the occurrence should be too much for the poor girl. I asked her to go on and take her walk with her friends, saying that I could go no further. She made excuses, and the more I urged her the firmer she became. She looked doubtful and frightened. I suppose there was something in my looks or manner that alarmed her; but she would not go, and that literally saved me. You had no idea, sir, that a living man could be made so abject a slave of Satan," he said, with a ghastly groan and a shudder.

There was a pause here, and I said, "You *were* preserved nevertheless. It was the act of God. You are in His hands and in the power of no other being: be therefore confident for the future."

Chapter 10

HOME

I made him have candles lighted, and saw the room looking cheery and inhabited before I left him. I told him that he must regard his illness strictly as one dependent on physical, though *subtle* physical causes. I told him that he had evidence of God's care and love in the deliverance which he had just described, and that I had perceived with pain that he seemed to regard its peculiar features as indicating that he had been delivered over to spiritual reprobation. Than such a conclusion nothing could be, I insisted, less warranted; and not only so, but more contrary to facts, as disclosed in his mysterious deliverance from that murderous influence during his Shropshire excursion. First, his niece had been retained by his side without his intending to keep her near him; and, secondly, there had been infused into his mind an irresistible repugnance to execute the dreadful suggestion in her presence.

As I reasoned this point with him, Mr. Jennings wept. He seemed comforted. One promise I exacted, which was that should the monkey at any time return, I should be sent for immediately; and, repeating my assurance that I would give neither time nor thought to any other subject until I had thoroughly investigated his case, and that to-morrow he should hear the result, I took my leave.

Before getting into the carriage I told the servant that his master was far from well, and that he should make a point of frequently going into his room.

My own arrangements I made with a view to being quite secure from interruption.

I merely called at my lodgings, and with a travelling-desk and carpet-bag, set off in a hackney carriage for an inn about two miles out of town, called "The Horns," a very quiet and comfortable house, with good thick walls. And there I resolved, without the possibility of intrusion or distraction, to devote some hours of the night, in my comfortable sitting-room, to Mr. Jennings' case, and so much of the morning as it might require.

(There occurs here a careful note of Dr. Hesselius' opinion upon the case, and of the habits, dietary, and medicines which he prescribed. It is curious—some persons would say mystical. But, on the whole, I doubt whether it would sufficiently interest a reader of the kind I am likely to meet with, to warrant its being here reprinted. The whole letter was plainly written at the inn where he had hid himself for the occasion. The next letter is dated from his town lodgings.)

I left town for the inn where I slept last night at half-past nine, and did not arrive at my room in town until one o'clock this afternoon. I found a letter in Mr. Jennings' hand upon my table. It had not come by post, and, on enquiry, I learned that Mr. Jennings' servant had brought it, and on learning that I was not to return until to-day, and that no one could tell him my address, he seemed

very uncomfortable, and said that his orders from his master were that he was not to return without an answer.

I opened the letter and read:

"Dear Dr. Hesselius.—It is here. You had not been an hour gone when it returned. It is speaking. It knows all that has happened. It knows everything—it knows you, and is frantic and atrocious. It reviles. I send you this. It knows every word I have written—I write. This I promised, and I therefore write, but I fear very confused, very incoherently. I am so interrupted, disturbed.

"Ever yours, sincerely yours,
"Robert Lynder Jennings."

"When did this come?" I asked.

"About eleven last night: the man was here again, and has been here three times to-day. The last time is about an hour since."

Thus answered, and with the notes I had made upon his case in my pocket, I was in a few minutes driving towards Richmond, to see Mr. Jennings.

I by no means, as you perceive, despaired of Mr. Jennings' case. He had himself remembered and applied, though quite in a mistaken way, the principle which I lay down in my Metaphysical Medicine, and which governs all such cases. I was about to apply it in earnest. I was profoundly interested, and very anxious to see and examine him while the "enemy" was actually present.

I drove up to the sombre house, and ran up the steps, and knocked. The door, in a little time, was opened by a tall woman in black silk. She looked ill, and as if she had been crying. She curtseyed, and heard my question, but she did not answer. She turned her face away, extending her hand towards two men who were coming down-stairs; and thus having, as it were, tacitly made me over to them, she passed through a side-door hastily and shut it.

The man who was nearest the hall, I at once accosted, but being now close to him, I was shocked to see that both his hands were covered with blood.

I drew back a little, and the man, passing down-stairs, merely said in a low tone, "Here's the servant, sir."

The servant had stopped on the stairs, confounded and dumb at seeing me. He was rubbing his hands in a handkerchief, and it was steeped in blood.

"Jones, what is it? what has happened?" I asked, while a sickening suspicion overpowered me.

The man asked me to come up to the lobby. I was beside him in a moment, and, frowning and pallid, with contracted eyes, he told me the horror which I already half guessed.

His master had made away with himself.

I went upstairs with him to the room—what I saw there I won't tell you. He had cut his throat with his razor. It was a frightful gash. The two men had laid him on the bed, and composed his limbs. It had happened, as the immense pool of blood on the floor declared, at some distance between the bed and the window. There was carpet round his bed, and a carpet under his dressing-table, but

none on the rest of the floor, for the man said he did not like a carpet on his bedroom. In this sombre and now terrible room, one of the great elms that darkened the house was slowly moving the shadow of one of its great boughs upon this dreadful floor.

I beckoned to the servant, and we went down-stairs together. I turned off the hall into an old-fashioned panelled room, and there standing, I heard all the servant had to tell. It was not a great deal.

"I concluded, sir, from your words, and looks, sir, as you left last night, that you thought my master seriously ill. I thought it might be that you were afraid of a fit, or something. So I attended very close to your directions. He sat up late, till past three o'clock. He was not writing or reading. He was talking a great deal to himself, but that was nothing unusual. At about that hour I assisted him to undress, and left him in his slippers and dressing-gown. I went back softly in about half-an-hour. He was in his bed, quite undressed, and a pair of candles lighted on the table beside his bed. He was leaning on his elbow, and looking out at the other side of the bed when I came in. I asked him if he wanted anything, and he said 'No.'

"I don't know whether it was what you said to me, sir, or something a little unusual about him, but I was uneasy, uncommon uneasy about him last night.

"In another half hour, or it might be a little more, I went up again. I did not hear him talking as before. I opened the door a little. The candles were both out, which was not usual. I had a bedroom candle, and I let the light in, a little bit, looking softly round. I saw him sitting in that chair beside the dressing-table with his clothes on again. He turned round and looked at me. I thought it strange he should get up and dress, and put out the candles to sit in the dark, that way. But I only asked him again if I could do anything for him. He said, 'No,' rather sharp, I thought. I asked if I might light the candles, and he said, 'Do as you like, Jones.' So I lighted them, and I lingered about the room, and he said, 'Tell me truth, Jones; why did you come again—you did not hear any one cursing?' 'No, sir,' I said, wondering what he could mean.

"'No,' said he, after me, 'of course, no'; and I said to him, 'Wouldn't it be well, sir, if you went to bed? It's just five o'clock'; and he said nothing but, 'Very likely; good-night, Jones.' So I went, sir, but in less than an hour I came again. The door was fast, and he heard me, and called as I thought from the bed to know what I wanted, and he desired me not to disturb him again. I lay down and slept for a little. It must have been between six and seven when I went up again. The door was still fast, and he made no answer, so I did not like to disturb him, and thinking he was asleep, I left him till nine. It was his custom to ring when he wished me to come, and I had no particular hour for calling him. I tapped very gently, and getting no answer, I stayed away a good while, supposing he was getting some rest then. It was not till eleven o'clock I grew really uncomfortable about him—for at the latest he was never, that I could remember, later than half-past ten. I got no answer. I knocked and called, and still no answer. So not being able to force the door, I called Thomas from the stables, and together we forced it, and found him in the shocking way you saw."

Jones had no more to tell. Poor Mr. Jennings was very gentle, and very kind. All his people were fond of him. I could see that the servant was very much moved.

So, dejected and agitated, I passed from that terrible house, and its dark canopy of elms, and I hope I shall never see it more. While I write to you I feel like a man who has but half waked from a frightful and monotonous dream. My memory rejects the picture with incredulity and horror. Yet I know it is true. It is the story of the process of a poison, a poison which excites the reciprocal action of spirit and nerve, and paralyses the tissue that separates those cognate functions of the senses, the external and the interior. Thus we find strange bed-fellows, and the mortal and immortal prematurely make acquaintance.

Conclusion

A WORD FOR THOSE WHO SUFFER

My dear Van L—, you have suffered from an affection similar to that which I have just described. You twice complained of a return of it.

Who, under God, cured you? Your humble servant, Martin Hesselius. Let me rather adopt the more emphasized piety of a certain good old French surgeon of three hundred years ago: "I treated, and God cured you."

Come, my friend, you are not to be hippish. Let me tell you a fact.

I have met with, and treated, as my book shows, fifty-seven cases of this kind of vision, which I term indifferently "sublimated," "precocious," and "interior."

There is another class of affections which are truly termed—though commonly confounded with those which I describe—spectral illusions. These latter I look upon as being no less simply curable than a cold in the head or a trifling dyspepsia.

It is those which rank in the first category that test our promptitude of thought. Fifty-seven such cases have I encountered, neither more nor less. And in how many of these have I failed? In no one single instance.

There is no one affliction of mortality more easily and certainly reducible, with a little patience, and a rational confidence in the physician. With these simple conditions, I look upon the cure as absolutely certain.

You are to remember that I had not even commenced to treat Mr. Jennings' case. I have not any doubt that I should have cured him perfectly in eighteen months, or possibly it might have extended to two years. Some cases are very rapidly curable, others extremely tedious. Every intelligent physician who will give thought and diligence to the task will effect a cure.

You know my tract on "The Cardinal Functions of the Brain." I there, by the evidence of innumerable facts, prove, as I think, the high probability of a circulation arterial and venous in its mechanism, through the nerves. Of this system, thus considered, the brain is the heart. The fluid, which is propagated hence through one class of nerves, returns in an altered state through another, and

the nature of that fluid is spiritual, though not immaterial, any more than, as I before remarked, light or electricity are so.

By various abuses, among which the habitual use of such agents as green tea is one, this fluid may be affected as to its quality, but it is more frequently disturbed as to equilibrium. This fluid being that which we have in common with spirits, a congestion found upon the masses of brain or nerve, connected with the interior sense, forms a surface unduly exposed, on which disembodied spirits may operate: communication is thus more or less effectually established. Between this brain circulation and the heart circulation there is an intimate sympathy. The seat, or rather the instrument of exterior vision, is the eye. The seat of interior vision is the nervous tissue and brain, immediately about and above the eyebrow. You remember how effectually I dissipated your pictures by the simple application of iced eau-de-cologne. Few cases, however, can be treated exactly alike with anything like rapid success. Cold acts powerfully as a repellant of the nervous fluid. Long enough continued it will even produce that permanent insensibility which we call numbness, and a little longer, muscular as well as sensational paralysis.

I have not, I repeat, the slightest doubt that I should have first dimmed and ultimately sealed that inner eye which Mr. Jennings had inadvertently opened. The same senses are opened in delirium tremens, and entirely shut up again when the over-action of the cerebral heart, and the prodigious nervous congestions that attend it, are terminated by a decided change in the state of the body. It is by acting steadily upon the body, by a simple process, that this result is produced—and inevitably produced—I have never yet failed.

Poor Mr. Jennings made away with himself. But that catastrophe was the result of a totally different malady, which, as it were, projected itself upon that disease which was established. His case was in the distinctive manner a complication, and the complaint under which he really succumbed was hereditary suicidal mania. Poor Mr. Jennings I cannot call a patient of mine, for I had not even begun to treat his case, and he had not yet given me, I am convinced, his full and unreserved confidence. If the patient do not array himself on the side of the disease, his cure is certain.

J. D. Beresford

THE MISANTHROPE

from Nineteen Impressions

Sidgwick & Jackson, 1918

Permission to reprint is granted by the author

1

Since I have returned from the rock and discussed the story in all its bearings, I have begun to wonder if the man made a fool of me. In the deeps of my consciousness I feel that he did not. Nevertheless, I cannot resist the effect of all the laughter that has been evoked by my narrative. Here on the mainland the whole thing seems unlikely, grotesque, foolish. On the rock the man's confession carried absolute conviction. The setting is everything; and I am, perhaps, thankful that my present circumstances are so beautifully conducive to sanity. No one appreciates the mystery of life more than I do; but when the mystery involves such a doubt of oneself, I find it pleasanter to forget. Naturally, I do not want to believe the story. If I did I should know myself to be some kind of human horror. And the terror of it all lies in the fact that I may never know precisely what kind. . . .

Before I went we had eliminated the facile and banal explanation that the man was mad, and had fallen back upon the two inevitable alternatives: Crime and Disappointed Love. We were human and romantic, and we tried desperately hard not to be too obvious.

Once before a man had made the same attempt and had built or tried to build a house on the Gulland rock; but he had been defeated within a fortnight, and what was left of his building was taken off the island and turned into a tin church. It is there still. We all went to Trevone and ruminated over and round it, perhaps with some faint hope that one of us might, all-unknowing, have the abilities of a psychometrist.

Nothing came of that visit but a slight intensification of those theories that were already becoming a little stale. We compared the early failure of thirty years ago, the attempt that was baffled, with the present success. For this new misanthrope had lived on the Gulland through the whole winter—and still lived. Indeed, the fact of his presence on that awful lump of rock was now accepted by the country people; to them he was scarcely a shade madder than the other visitors; that remunerative, recurrent host that this year broke their journey to Bedruthan in order to stand on Trevone beach and stare foolishly at the just

visible hut that stuck like a cubical gall on the landward face of that humped, desolate island.

We all did that; stared at nothing in particular and meditated enormously; but in what I felt at the time was a wild spirit of adventure, I went out one night to the point of Gunver Head and saw an actual light within that distant hut; a patch of golden lichen on the mother parasite.

Some aspect of humanity I found in that light it was that finally decided me; that and some quality of sympathy, perhaps with the hermit—mad, criminal, or lovelorn?—who had found sanctuary from the pestilent touch of the encroaching crowd. It was, in fact, a wildish night, and I stayed until the little yellow speck went out, and all I could see through the murk was an occasional canopy of curving spray when the elbow of the Trevone Light touched a bare corner of that black Gulland.

The making of a decision was no difficult matter, but while I waited for the necessary calm that would permit the occasional boat to land provisions on the island two miles out from the mainland, I suffered qualms of doubt and nervousness. And I suffered them alone, for I had determined that no hint of my adventure should be given to anyone of our party until the voyage had been made. They might think that I had gone fishing, an excuse which had all the air of probability given to it by the coming of the boatman to say that the tide and wind would serve that morning. I had warned—and bribed—him to give no clue to my friends of the goal of my proposed excursion.

My nervousness suffered no decrease as we approached the rock and saw the authentic figure of its single inhabitant awaiting our arrival. I had some consolation in the thought that he would be in some way prepared by the sight of our surprisingly passengered boat; but my mind shuddered at the necessity for using some conventional form of address if I would make at once my introduction and excuse. The civilised opening was so hopelessly incapable of expressing my sympathy, presenting instead so unmistakably, it seemed to me, the single solution of common curiosity. I wondered that he had not—as the boatman so clearly assured me was the case—had other prying visitors before me.

My self-consciousness increased as we came nearer to the single opening among the spiked rocks, that served as a miniature harbour at half-tide. I felt that I was being watched by the man who now stood awaiting us at the water's edge. And suddenly my spirit broke, I decided that I could not force myself upon him, that I would remain in the boat while its cargo was delivered, and then return with the boatmen to Trevone. So resolute was I in this plan that when we had pulled in to the tiny landing-place, I kept my gaze steadfastly averted from the man I had come to see, and stared solemnly out at the humped back of Trevone, seen now in an entirely new aspect.

The sound of the hermit's voice startled me from a perfectly genuine abstraction.

"Fairly decent weather to-day," he remarked with, I thought, a touch of nervousness. He had, I remembered, addressed the same remark to the boatmen, who were now conveying their cargo up to the hut.

I looked up and met his stare. He was, indeed, regarding me with a curious effect of concentration, as if he were eager to note every detail of my expression.

"Jolly," I replied. "Been pretty beastly the last day or two. Kept you rather short, hasn't it?"

"I make allowances for that," he said. "Keep a reserve, you know. Are you staying over there?" He nodded towards the bay.

"For a week or two," I told him, and we began to discuss the country around Harlyn with the eagerness of two strangers who find a common topic at a dull reception.

"Never been on the Gulland before, I suppose?" he ventured at last, when the boatmen had discharged their load and were evidently ready to be off.

"No, no, I haven't," I said, and hesitated. I felt that the invitation must come from him.

He boggled over it by saying, "Dashed awkward place to get to, and nothing to see, of course. I don't know if you're at all keen on fishing?"

"Rather," I said with enthusiasm.

"There's deep water on the other side of the rock," he went on. "In the right weather you get splendid bass there." He stopped and then added, "It'll be absolutely top hole for 'em, this afternoon."

"Perhaps I could come back . . ." I began; but the boatman interrupted me at once.

"Yew can coom back to-morrow, sure 'nough," he said. "Tide only serves wance avery twalve hours."

"If you'd care to stay, now . . ." began the hermit.

"Thanks! it's awfully good of you. I should like to of all things," I said.

I stayed on the clear understanding that the boatmen were to fetch me the next morning.

2

At first there was really very little that seemed in any way strange about the man on the Gulland. His name, he told me, was William Copley, but it appeared that he was no relation to the Copleys I knew. And if he had shaved he would have looked a very ordinary type of Englishman roughing it on a holiday. His age I judged to be between thirty and forty.

Only two things about him struck me as a little queer during our very successful afternoon's fishing. The first was that intense appraising stare of his, as if he tried to fathom the very depths of one's being. The second was an inexplicable devotion to one particular form of ceremony. As our intimacy grew, he dropped the ordinary formal politeness of a host; but he insisted always on one observance that I supposed at first to be the merely conventional business of giving precedence.

Nothing would induce him to go in front of me. He sent me ahead even as we explored the little purlieus of his rock—the only level square yard on the whole island was in the floor of the hut. But presently I noticed that this pe-

culiarity went still further, and that he would not turn his back on me for a single moment.

That discovery intrigued one. I still excluded the explanation of madness—Copley's manner and conversation were so convincingly sane. But I reverted to and elaborated those other two suggestions that had been made. I could not avoid the inference that the man must in some strange way be afraid of me; and I hesitated as to whether he were flying from some form of justice or from revenge, perhaps a vendetta. Either theory seemed to account for his intense, appraising stare. I inferred that his longing for companionship had grown so strong that he had determined to risk the possibility of my being an emissary, sent by some—to me—exquisitely romantic person or persons who desired Copley's death. I recalled, and wallowed in, some of the marvellous imaginings of the novelist. I wondered if I could make Copley speak by convincing him of my innocent identity. How I thrilled at the prospect!

But the explanation of it all came without any effort on my part.

He sent me out of the hut while he prepared our supper—quite a magnificent meal, by the way. I saw his reason at once; he could not manage all that business of cooking and laying the table without turning his back on me. One thing, however, puzzled me a little; he drew down the blind of the little square window as soon as I had gone outside.

Naturally, I made no demur. I climbed down to the edge of the sea—it was a glorious evening—and waited until he called me. He stood at the door of the hut until I was within a few feet of him, and then retreated into the room and sat down with his back to the wall.

We discussed our afternoon's sport as we had supper, but when we had finished and our pipes were going, he said, suddenly:

"I don't see why I shouldn't tell you."

Like a fool, I agreed eagerly, when I might so easily have stopped him. . . .

"It began when I was quite a kid," he said. "My mother found me crying in the garden; and all I could tell her was that Claude, my elder brother, looked 'horrid.' I couldn't bear the sight of him for days afterwards, either; but I was such a perfectly normal child that they weren't seriously perturbed about this one idiosyncrasy of mine. They thought that Claude had 'made a face' at me, and frightened me. My father whacked me for it eventually.

"Perhaps that whacking stuck in my mind. Anyway, I didn't confide my peculiarity to anyone until I was nearly seventeen. I was ashamed of it, of course. I am still—in a way."

He stopped and looked down, pushed his plate away from him, and folded his arms on the table. I was pining to ask a question, but I was afraid to interrupt. And after a moment's hesitation he looked up and held my gaze again, but now without that inquiring look of his. Rather, he seemed to be looking for sympathy.

"I told my house-master," he said. "He was a splendid chap, and he was very decent about it; took it all quite seriously and advised me to consult an oculist, which I did. I went in the holidays with the pater—I had given him a more

reasonable account of my trouble—and he took me to the best man in London. He was tremendously interested, and it proves that there must be something in it, that it can't be imagination, because he really found a defect in my eyes, something quite new to him, he said. He called it a new form of astigmatism; but, of course, as he pointed out, no glasses would be any use to me."

"But what . . . ?" I began, unable to keep down my curiosity any longer.

Copley hesitated, and dropped his eyes. "Astigmatism, you know," he said, "is a defect—I quote the dictionary, I learned that definition by heart; I often puzzle over it still—'causing images of lines having a certain direction to be indistinctly seen, while those of lines transverse to the former are distinctly seen.' Only mine is peculiar in the fact that my sight is perfectly normal except when I look back at anyone over my shoulder." He looked up, almost pathetically. I could see that he hoped I might understand without further explanation.

I had to confess myself utterly mystified. What had this trifling defect of vision to do with his coming to live on the Gulland, I wondered.

I frowned my perplexity. "But I don't see . . ." I said.

He knocked out his pipe and began to scrape the bowl with his pocket-knife. "Well, mine is a kind of moral astigmatism, too," he said. "At least, it gives me a kind of moral insight. I'm afraid I must call it insight. I've proved in some cases that . . ." He dropped his voice. He was apparently deeply engrossed in the scraping out of his pipe. He kept his eyes on it as he continued.

"Normally, you understand, when I look at people straight in the face, I see them as anybody else sees them. But when I look back at them over my shoulder I see . . . oh! I see all their vices and defects. Their faces remain, in a sense, the same, perfectly recognisable, I mean, but distorted—beastly. . . . There was my brother Claude—good-looking chap, he was—but when I saw him . . . that way . . . he had a nose like a parrot, and he looked sort of weakly voracious . . . and vicious." He stopped and shuddered slightly, and then added: "And one knows, now, that he is like that, too. He's just been hammered on the Stock Exchange. Rotten sort of failure it was. . . .

"And then Denison, my house-master, you know; such a decent chap. I never looked at him, that way, until the end of my last term at school. I had got into the habit, more or less, of never looking over my shoulder, you see. But I was always getting caught. That was an instance. I was playing for the School against the Old Boys. Denison called out, 'Good luck, old chap,' just as I was going in, and I forgot and looked back at him. . . ."

I waited, breathless, and as he did not go on, I prompted him with "Was he . . . 'wrong,' too?"

Copley nodded. "Weak, poor devil. His eyes were all right, but they were fighting his mouth, if you know what I mean. There would have been an awful scandal at the school there, four years after I left, if they hadn't hushed it up and got Denison out of the country.

"Then, if you want any more instances, there was the oculist—big, fine chap, he was. Of course, he made me look at him over my shoulder, to test me. He asked me what I saw, and I told, more or less. He was simply livid for a moment.

He was a sensualist, you see; and when I saw him that way he looked like some filthy old hog.

"The thing that really finished me," he went on, after a long interval, "was the breaking off of my engagement to Helen. We were frightfully in love with one another, and I told her about my trouble. She was very sympathetic, and I suppose rather sentimentally romantic, too. She believed it was some sort of spell that had been put on me. I think, anyway, she had a theory that if I once saw anybody truly and ordinarily over my shoulder, I should never have any more trouble—the spell-would-be-broken sort of thing. And, of course, *she* wanted to be the person. I didn't resist her much. I was infatuated, I suppose. Anyway, I thought she was perfection and that it was simply impossible that I could find any defect in her. So I agreed, and looked—that way. . . ."

His voice had fallen to an even note of despondency, as though the telling of this final tragedy in his life had brought him to the indifference of despair. "I looked," he continued, "and saw a creature with no chin and watery, doting eyes; a faithful, slobbery thing—eugh! I can't. . . . I never spoke to her again. . . .

"That broke me, you know," he said presently. "After that I didn't care. I used to look at everyone that way, until I had to get away from humanity. I was living in a world of beasts. Most of them looked like some beast or bird or other. The strong were vicious and criminal; and the weak were loathsome. I couldn't stick it. In the end—I had to come here away from them all."

A thought occurred to me. "Have you ever looked at yourself in the glass?" I asked.

He nodded. "I'm no better than the rest of them," he said. "That's why I grew this rotten beard. I hadn't got a looking-glass here."

"And you can't keep a stiff neck, as it were," I asked, "going about looking humanity straight in the face?"

"The temptation is too strong," Copley said. "And it gets stronger. Curiosity, partly, I suppose; but partly it's the momentary sense of superiority it gives you. You see them like that, you know, and forget how you look yourself. And then after a bit it sickens you."

"You haven't . . ." I said, and hesitated. I wanted to know and yet I was horribly afraid. "You haven't," I began again, "er—you haven't—er—looked at me yet . . . that way?"

"Not yet," he said.

"Do you suppose . . . ?"

"Probably. You look all right, of course. But then so did heaps of the others."

"You've no idea *how* I should look to you, that way?"

"Absolutely none. I've been trying to guess, but I can't."

"You wouldn't care . . . ?"

"Not now," he said sharply. "Perhaps, just before you go."

"You feel fairly certain, then . . . ?"

He nodded with disgusting conviction.

I went to bed, wondering whether Helen's theory wasn't a true one; and if I might not break the spell for poor Copley.

3

The boatmen came for me soon after eleven next morning.

I had shaken off some of the feeling of superstitious horror that had held me overnight, and I had not repeated my request to Copley; nor had he offered to look into the dark places of my soul.

He came down after me to the landing-place and we shook hands warmly, but he said nothing about my revisiting him.

And then, just as we were putting off, he turned back towards the hut and looked at me over his shoulder—just one quick glance.

"Wait," I commanded the boatmen, and I stood up and called to him.

"I say, Copley," I shouted.

He turned and looked at me, and I saw that his face was transfigured. He wore an expression of foolish disgust and loathing. I had seen something like it on the face of an idiot child who was just going to be sick.

I dropped down into the boat and turned my back on him.

I wondered then if that was how he had seen himself in the glass.

But since I have only wondered what it was he saw in me. . . .

And I can never go back to ask him.

John Metcalfe

THE BAD LANDS

from The Smoking Leg and Other Stories

Jarrolds, 1925

Permission to reprint is granted by the author and A. D. Peters

It is now perhaps fifteen years ago that Brent Ormerod, seeking the rest and change of scene that should help him to slay the demon neurosis, arrived in Todd towards the close of a mid-October day. A decrepit fly bore him to the one hotel, where his rooms were duly engaged, and it is this vision of himself sitting in the appalling vehicle that makes him think it was October or thereabouts, for he distinctly remembers the determined settling down of the dusk that forced him to drive when he would have preferred to follow his luggage on foot.

He decided immediately that five o'clock was an unsuitable time to arrive in Todd. The atmosphere, as it were, was not receptive. There was a certain repellent quality about the frore autumn air, and something peculiarly shocking in the way in which desultory little winds would spring up in darkening

streets to send the fallen leaves scurrying about in hateful, furtive whirlpools.

Dinner, too, at the hotel hardly brought the consolation he had counted on. The meal itself was unexceptionable, and the room cheerful and sufficiently well filled for that time of year, yet one trivial circumstance was enough to send him upstairs with his temper ruffled and his nerves on edge. They had put him to a table with a one-eyed man, and that night the blank eye haunted all his dreams.

But for the first eight or nine days at Todd things went fairly well with him. He took frequent cold baths and regular exercise and made a point of coming back to the hotel so physically tired that to get into bed was usually to drop immediately into sleep. He wrote back to his sister Joan, at Kensington, that his nerves were already much improved and that only another fortnight seemed needed to complete the cure. "Altogether a highly satisfactory week."

Those who have been to Todd remember it as a quiet, secretive watering-place, couched watchfully in a fold of a long range of low hills along the Norfolk coast. It has been pronounced "restful" by those in high authority, for time there has a way of passing dreamily as if the days, too, were being blown past like the lazy clouds on the wings of wandering breezes. At the back, the look of the land is somehow strangely forbidding, and it is wiser to keep to the shore and the more neighbouring villages. Salterton, for instance, has been found quite safe and normal.

There are long stretches of sand dunes to the west, and by their side a nine-hole golf-course. Here, at the time of Brent's visit, stood an old and crumbling tower, an enigmatic structure which he found interesting from its sheer futility. Behind it an inexplicable road seemed to lead with great decision most uncomfortably to nowhere. . . . Todd, he thought, was in many ways a nice spot, but he detected in it a tendency to grow on one unpleasantly.

He came to this conclusion at the end of the ninth day, for it was then that he became aware of a peculiar uneasiness, an indescribable *malaise*.

This feeling of disquiet he at first found himself quite unable to explain or analyse. His nerves he had thought greatly improved since he had left Kensington, and his general health was good. He decided, however, that perhaps yet more exercise was necessary, and so he walked along the links and the sand dunes to the queer tower and the inexplicable road that lay behind it three times a day instead of twice.

His discomfort rapidly increased. He would become conscious, as he set out for his walk, of a strange sinking at his heart and of a peculiar moral disturbance which was very difficult to describe. These sensations attained their maximum when he had reached his goal upon the dunes, and he suffered then what something seemed to tell him was very near the pangs of spiritual dissolution.

It was on the eleventh day that some faint hint of the meaning of these peculiar symptoms crossed his mind. For the first time he asked himself why it was that of all the many rambles he had taken in Todd since his arrival each one seemed inevitably to bring him to the same place—the yellow sand dunes with the mysterious looking tower in the background. Something in the bland

foolishness of the structure seemed to have magnetised him, and in the unaccountable excitement which the sight of it invariably produced, he had found himself endowing it with almost human characteristics.

With its white nightcap dome and its sides of pale yellow stucco it might seem at one moment to be something extravagantly ridiculous, a figure of fun at which one should laugh and point. Then, as likely as not, its character would change a little, and it would take on the abashed and crestfallen look of a jester whose best joke has fallen deadly flat, while finally, perhaps, it would develop with startling rapidity into a jovial old gentleman laughing madly at Ormerod from the middle distance out of infinite funds of merriment.

Now Brent was well aware of the dangers of an obsession such as this, and he immediately resolved to rob the tower of its unwholesome fascination by simply walking straight up to it, past it, and onwards along the road that stretched behind it.

It was on the morning of one of the last October days that he set out from the hotel with this intention in his mind. He reached the dunes at about ten, and plodded with some difficulty across them in the direction of the tower. As he neared it his accustomed sensations became painfully apparent, and presently increased to such a pitch that it was all he could do to continue on his way.

He remembered being struck again with the peculiar character of the winding road that stretched before him into a hazy distance where everything seemed to melt and swim in shadowy vagueness. On his left the gate stood open, to his right the grotesque form of the tower threatened. . . .

Now he had reached it, and its shadow fell straight across his path. He did not halt to examine it, but strode forward through the open gate and entered upon the winding road. At the same moment he was astonished to notice that the painful clutch at his heart was immediately lifted, and that with it, too, all the indescribable uneasiness which he had characterised to himself as "moral" had utterly disappeared.

He had walked on for some little distance before another rather remarkable fact struck his attention. The country was no longer vague; rather, it was peculiarly distinct, and he was able to see for long distances over what seemed considerable stretches of park-like land, grey, indeed, in tone and somehow sad with a most poignant melancholy, yet superficially, at least, well cultivated and in some parts richly timbered. He looked behind him to catch a glimpse of Todd and of the sea, but was surprised to find that in that direction the whole landscape was become astonishingly indistinct and shadowy.

It was not long before the mournful aspect of the country about him began so to depress him and work upon his nerves that he debated with himself the advisability of returning at once to the hotel. He found that the ordinary, insignificant things about him were becoming charged with sinister suggestion and that the scenery on all sides was rapidly developing an unpleasant tendency to the *macabre*. Moreover his watch told him that it was now half-past eleven—and lunch was at one. Almost hastily he turned about and began to descend the winding road.

It was about an hour later that he again reached the tower and saw the familiar dunes stretching once more before him. For some reason or other he seemed to have found the way back much longer and more difficult than the outward journey, and it was with a feeling of distinct relief that he actually passed through the gate and set his face towards Todd.

He did not go out again that afternoon, but sat smoking and thinking in the hotel. In the lounge he spoke to a man who sat in a chair beside him.

"What a queer place that is all at the back there behind the dunes!"

His companion's only comment was a somewhat drowsy grunt.

"Behind the tower," pursued Ormerod, "the funny tower at the other end of the links. The most God-forsaken, dismal place you can imagine. And simply miles of it!"

The other, roused to coherence much against his will, turned slowly round.

"Don't know it," he said. "There's a large farm where you say, and the other side of that is a river, and then you come to Harkaby or somewhere."

He closed his eyes and Ormerod was left to ponder the many difficulties of his remarks.

At dinner he found a more sympathetic listener. Mr. Stanton-Boyle had been in Todd a week when Brent arrived, and his sensitive, young-old face with the eager eyes and the quick, nervous contraction of the brows had caught the newcomer's attention from the first. Up to now, indeed, they had only exchanged commonplaces, but to-night each seemed more disposed towards intimacy. Ormerod began.

"I suppose you've walked around the country at the back here a good deal?" he said.

"No," replied the other. "I never go there now. I went there once or twice and that was enough."

"Why?"

"Oh, it gets on my nerves, that's all. Do you get any golf here? . . ."

The conversation passed to other subjects, and it was not until both were smoking together over liqueur brandies in the lounge that it returned to the same theme. And then they came to a remarkable conclusion.

"The country at the back of this place," said Brent's companion, "is somehow abominable. It ought to be blown up or something. I don't say it was always like that. Last year, for instance, I don't remember noticing it at all. I fancy it may have been depressing enough, but it was not—not abominable. It's gone abominable since then, particularly to the south-west!"

They said good-night after agreeing to compare notes on Todd, S.W., and Ormerod had a most desolating dream wherein he walked up and up into a strange dim country, full of sighs and whisperings and crowding, sombre trees, where hollow breezes blew fitfully, and a queer house set with lofty pine shone out white against a lurid sky. . . .

On the next day he walked again past the tower and through the gate and along the winding road. As he left Todd behind him and began the slow ascent among the hills he became conscious of some strange influence that hung over

the country like a brooding spirit. The clearness of the preceding day was absent; instead, all seemed nebulous and indistinct, and the sad landscape dropped behind and below him in the numb, unreal recession of a dream.

It was about four o'clock, and as he slowly ascended into the mournful tracts the greyness of the late autumn day was deepening into dusk. All the morning, clouds had been gathering in the west, and now the dull ache of the damp sky gave the uneasy sense of impending rain. Here a fitful wind blew the gold flame of a sear leaf athwart the November gloom, and out along the horizon great leaden masses were marching out to sea.

A terrible sense of loneliness fell upon the solitary walker trudging up into the sighing country, and even the sight of scattered habitations, visible here and there among the shadows, seemed only to intensify his feeling of dream and unreality. Everywhere the uplands strained in the moist wind, and the lines of gaunt firs that marched against the horizon gloom pointed ever out to sea. The wan crowding on of the weeping heavens, the settled pack of those leaning firs, and the fitful scurry of the leaves in the chill blast down the lane smote upon his spirit as something unutterably sad and terrible. On his right a skinny blackthorn shot up hard and wiry towards the dull, grey sky; there ahead trees in a wood fluttered ragged, yellow flags against the dimness.

A human figure appeared before him, and presently he saw that it was a man, apparently a labourer. He carried tools upon his shoulders, and his head was bent so that it was only when Ormerod addressed him that he looked up and showed a withered countenance. "What is the name of all this place?" said Brent, with a wide sweep of his arm.

"This," said the labourer, in a voice so thin and tired that it seemed almost like the cold breath of the wind that drove beside them, "is Hayes-in-the-Up. Of course, though, it'll be a mile further on for you before you get to Fennington." He pointed in the direction from which he had just come, turned his sunken eyes again for a moment upon Ormerod, and then quickly faded down the descending path.

Brent looked after him wondering, but as he swept his gaze about him much of his wonder vanished. All around, the wan country seemed to rock giddily beneath those lowering skies, so heavy with the rain that never fell; all around, the sailing uplands seemed to heave and yearn under the sad tooting of the damp November wind. Oh, he could well imagine that the men of this weary, twilight region would be worn and old before their time, with its sinister stare in their eyes and its haggard gloom abroad in their pinched faces!

Thinking thus, he walked on steadily, and it was not long before certain words of the man he had met rose with uneasy suggestion to the surface of his mind. What, he asked himself, was Fennington? Somehow he did not think that the name stood for another village; rather, the word seemed to connect itself ominously with the dream he had had some little time ago. He shuddered, and had not walked many paces further before he found that his instinct was correct.

Opposite him, across a shallow valley, stood that white house, dimly set in giant pine. Here the winds seemed almost visible as they strove in those lofty

trees and the constant rush by of the weeping sky behind made all the view seem to tear giddily through some unreal, watery medium. A striking resemblance of the pines to palm-trees and a queer effect of light which brought the white façade shaking bright against the sailing cloud-banks gave the whole a strangely exotic look.

Gazing at it across the little valley, Ormerod felt somehow that this, indeed, was the centre and hub of the wicked country, the very kernel and essence of this sad, unwholesome land that he saw flung wide in weariness about him. This abomination was it that magnetised him, that attracted him from afar with fatal fascination, and threatened him with untold disaster. Almost sobbing, he descended his side of the valley and then rose again to meet the house.

Park-like land surrounded the building, and from the smooth turf arose the pines and some clusters of shrubs. Amongst these Ormerod walked carefully till he was suddenly so near that he could look into a small room through its open window whilst he sheltered in a large yew whose dusky skirts swept the ground.

The room seemed strangely bare and deserted. A small table was pushed to one side, and dust lay thick upon it. Nearer Ormerod a chair or two appeared, and, opposite, a great black mantelpiece glowered in much gloom. In the centre of the floor was set the object that seemed to dominate the whole.

This was a large and cumbrous spinning-wheel of forbidding mien. It glistened foully in the dim light, and its many moulded points pricked the air in very awful fashion. Waiting there in the close stillness, the watcher fancied he could see the treadle stir. Quickly, with beating heart, beset by sudden dread, he turned away, retraced his steps among the sheltering shrubs, and descended to the valley bottom.

He climbed up the other side, and was glad to walk rapidly away down the winding path till, on turning his head, it was no longer possible to see the evil house he had just left.

It must have been near six o'clock when, on approaching the gate and tower, weary from his walk and anxious to reach the familiar and reassuring atmosphere of the hotel, he came suddenly upon a man walking through the darkness in the same direction as himself. It was Stanton-Boyle.

Ormerod quickly overtook him and spoke. "You have no idea," he said, "how glad I am to see you. We can walk back together now."

As they strolled to the hotel Brent described his walk, and he saw the other trembling. Presently Stanton-Boyle looked at him earnestly and spoke. "I've been there too," he said, "and I feel just as you do about it. I feel that that place Fennington is the centre of the rottenness. I looked through the window, too, and saw the spinning-wheel and——" He stopped suddenly. "No," he went on quietly a moment later, "I won't tell you what else I saw!"

"It ought to be destroyed!" shouted Ormerod. A curious excitement tingled in his blood. His voice was loud, so that people passing them in the street turned and gazed after them. His eyes were very bright. He went on, pulling Stanton-Boyle's arm impressively. "I shall destroy it!" he said. "I shall burn it and I

shall most assuredly smash that old spinning-wheel and break off its horrid spiky points!" He had a vague sense of saying curious and unusual things, but this increased rather than moderated his unaccountable elation.

Stanton-Boyle seemed somewhat abnormal too. He seemed to be gliding along the pavement with altogether unexampled smoothness and nobility as he turned his glowing eyes on Brent. "Destroy it!" he said. "Burn it! Before it is too late and it destroys you. Do this and you will be an unutterably brave man!"

When they reached the hotel Ormerod found a telegram awaiting him from Joan. He had not written to her for some time and she had grown anxious and was coming down herself on the following day. He must act quickly, before she came, for her mind in this matter would be unsympathetic. That night as he parted from Stanton-Boyle his eyes blazed in a high resolve. "To-morrow," he said, as he shook the other's hand, "I shall attempt it."

The following morning found the neurotic as good as his word. He carried matches and a tin of oil. His usually pale cheeks were flushed and his eyes sparkled strangely. Those who saw him leave the hotel remembered afterwards how his limbs had trembled and his speech halted. Stanton-Boyle, who was to see him off at the tower, reflected these symptoms in a less degree. Both men were observed to set out arm-in-arm engaged in earnest conversation.

At about noon Stanton-Boyle returned. He had walked with Ormerod to the sand dunes, and there left him to continue on his strange mission alone. He had seen him pass the tower, strike the fatal gate in the slanting morning sun, and then dwindle up the winding path till he was no more than an intense, pathetic dot along that way of mystery.

As he returned he was aware of companionship along the street. He looked round and noticed a policeman strolling in much abstraction some fifty yards behind him. Again at the hotel-entrance he turned about. The same figure in blue uniform was visible, admiring the houses opposite from the shade of an adjacent lamp-post. Stanton-Boyle frowned and withdrew to lunch.

At half-past two Joan arrived. She inquired nervously for Ormerod, and was at once addressed by Stanton-Boyle, who had waited for her in the entrance hall as desired by Brent. "Mr. Ormerod," he told her, "is out. He is very sorry. Will you allow me the impropriety of introducing myself? My name is Stanton-Boyle. . . ."

Joan tore open the note which had been left for her by Ormerod. She seemed to find the contents unsatisfactory, for she proceeded to catechise Stanton-Boyle upon her brother's health and general habit of life at Todd. Following this she left the hotel hastily after ascertaining the direction from which Ormerod might be expected to return.

Stanton-Boyle waited. The moments passed, heavy, anxious, weighted with the sense of coming trouble. He sat and smoked. Discreet and muffled noises from within the hotel seemed full somehow of uneasy suggestion and foreboding. Outside, the street looked very gloomy in the November darkness. Something, assuredly, would happen directly.

It came, suddenly. A sound of tramping feet and excited cries that grew rapidly

in volume and woke strange echoes in the reserved autumnal roads. Presently the tumult lessened abruptly, and only broken, fitful shouts and staccato ejaculations stabbed the silence. Stanton-Boyle jumped to his feet and walked hurriedly to the entrance hall.

Here there were cries and hustlings and presently strong odours and much suppressed excitement. He saw Joan talking very quickly to the manager of the hotel. She seemed to be developing a Point-of-View, and it was evident that it was not the manager's. For some time the press of people prevented him from discovering the cause of the commotion, but here and there he could make out detached sentences: "Tried to set old Hackney's farm on fire——" "But they'd seen him before and another man too, so——" "Asleep in the barn several times."

Before long, all but the hotel residents had dispersed, and in the centre of the considerable confusion which still remained it was now possible to see Ormerod supported by two policemen. A third hovered in the background with a large notebook. As Stanton-Boyle gazed, Brent lifted his bowed head so that their eyes met. "I have done it," he said. "I smashed it up. I brought back one of its points in my pocket . . . Overcoat, left hand . . . as a proof." Having pronounced which words Mr. Ormerod fainted very quietly.

For some time there was much disturbance. The necessary arrangements for the temporary pacification of the Law and of the Hotel had to be carried through, and after that Ormerod had to be got to bed. It was only after the initial excitement had in large measure abated that Stanton-Boyle ventured to discuss the matter over the after-dinner coffee. He had recognised one of the three policemen as the man whom he had noticed in the morning, and had found it well to retire from observation until he and his companions had left the hotel. Now, however, he felt at liberty to explain his theories of the situation to such as chose to listen.

He held forth with peculiar vehemence and with appropriate gestures. He spoke of a new kind of *terre-mauvaise*, of strange regions, connected, indeed, with definite geographical limits upon the earth, yet somehow apart from them and beyond them. "The relation," he said, "is rather one of parallelism and correspondence than of actual connection. I honestly believe that these regions do exist, and are quite as 'real' in their way as the ordinary world we know. We might say they consist in a special and separated set of stimuli to which only certain minds in certain conditions are able to respond. Such a district seems to be superimposed upon the country to the south-west of this place."

A laugh arose. "You won't get the magistrate to believe that," said someone. "Why, all where you speak of past that gate by the dunes is just old Hackney's farm and nothing else."

"Of course," said another. "It was one of old Hackney's barns he was setting alight, I understand. I was speaking to one of the policemen about it. He said that fellow Ormerod had always been fossicking around there, and had gone to sleep in the barn twice. I expect it's all bad dreams."

A third spoke derisively. "Surely," he said, "you don't really expect us to believe in your Bad Lands. It's like Jack-in-the-Beanstalk."

"All right!" said Stanton-Boyle. "Have it your own way! I know my use of the term 'Bad Lands' may be called incorrect, because it usually means that bit in the States, you know—but that's a detail. I tell you I've run up against things like this before. There was the case of Dolly Wishart, but no, I won't say anything about that—you wouldn't believe it."

The group around looked at him oddly. Suddenly there was a stir, and a man appeared in the doorway. He carried Ormerod's overcoat.

"This may settle the matter," he said. "I heard him say he'd put something in the pocket. He said—"

Stanton-Boyle interrupted him excitedly. "Why, yes," he said. "I'd forgotten that. What I was telling you about—the spinning-wheel. It will be interesting to see if—" He stopped and fumbled in the pockets. In another moment he brought out something which he held in his extended hand for all to see.

It was part of the handle of a patent separator—an object familiar enough to any who held even meagre acquaintance with the life of farms, and upon it could still be discerned the branded letters G. P. H.

"George Philip Hackney," interpreted the unbelievers with many smiles.

A. M. Burrage

NOBODY'S HOUSE

from Some Ghost Stories

Cecil Palmer, 1927

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They faced each other across the threshold of the great door in the dimness of two meagre lights. It was just dusk on a windy autumn evening, and Mrs. Park, the caretaker, had brought a candle with her to answer the summons at the door. Behind the stranger the last grey light of the day filtered through veils of dingy, low-flying clouds. Between them the candle flame fluttered in the draught like a yellow pennon, the cavernous darkness of the hall advancing and retreating like some monster at once curious and shy.

The man was tall and broad and seemingly in the early fifties. He wore a grey moustache and beard, both closely trimmed, and his black velour hat was pulled low down over a high forehead. His overcoat was cut to an old-fashioned pattern, having a cape to it, and it was perhaps this which lent him an air of—even at his years—having outlived his age.

He was fumbling in an inside pocket when the door was opened, and he said nothing until he had produced an envelope.

"I have an order from Messrs. Flake and Limpenny to see the house." Here he offered Mrs. Park the envelope. "I am afraid I have called at an inopportune time, but I missed one train and the next arrived late. Perhaps, however, you won't mind showing me over?"

He spoke slowly and a little nervously, as if he were repeating a speech which he had previously prepared. His voice was very low and mellowed and gentle. Mrs. Park stood back from the threshold.

"Will you come in, sir?" she said. "I am afraid you won't be seeing the house at its best. I shall have to show you over by candle; there is no gas or electric light."

He stepped inside and scrutinized her. She was a tall, gaunt, middle-aged woman of the kind which is generally described as "superior." Nature had intended her to become matron of an institute. Fate and widowhood had forced her a rung or two down the ladder. She looked what she was—honest, hard-working, and almost devoid of sympathy.

"I'm afraid," she added in her hard, toneless voice, "you'll find everything just anyhow. I wasn't expecting anybody. Very few people come here nowadays. And a place of this size takes more than one pair of hands to keep it clean."

"It has been empty a long time, then?" he hazarded.

"Ever since——" She checked herself suddenly. "For more than twenty years, I should think." She turned her shoulder upon him, lifting the candle above her head. "This is supposed to be a fine hall, and everybody admires the staircase. If the house doesn't find a tenant or a purchaser soon, I hear they intend removing the staircase and selling it separately. There is a lot of fine oak panelling, too. The library——"

Turning to see if he were listening, she saw him start and shiver and rub his long, thin hands together.

"Excuse me," he said. "I have been a long time in the train, and I am very cold. I wonder if it would be troubling you too much to get me a cup of tea."

"Yes, I could do that," she answered. "The kettle is on, for I intended having one myself. Will you come this way? Perhaps you would like a warm by the fire?"

She led the way across the hall and through a baize-covered door at the end. Turning once to see if she were giving him sufficient light, Mrs. Park noticed that he walked with a slight limp. He followed her down a short passage, through a great kitchen ruddy with firelight, down another passage, and into a small room intended to be used as a housekeeper's parlour. Here there was warmth, even stuffiness. A paraffin lamp stood burning on a flaming red table-cloth. The room was full of hideous modern cottage furniture, and decorated largely with the portraits of people who ought to have known better than to be photographed. He saw at a glance Mrs. Park in some kind of uniform, Mrs. Park's mother wearing bustles, Mrs. Park's father in stiff Sunday attire and side-whiskers. But a fire burned brightly in the grate, and a kettle on a brass trivet murmured and rattled its lid. This commonplace room, lighted and hot and over-furnished, was at least a relief from the dark passage and the draughty, gloom-ridden hall.

"I'll give you your tea in here, sir, and take mine in the kitchen," the caretaker said.

"Nonsense. Why should you? Besides, I want to talk. Oh, here's the order to view. You see . . . Mr. Stephen Royds—that's my name . . . to view . . ."

He was running his thumbnail along the sheet of heavily headed office notepaper. Mrs. Park glanced perfunctorily at the typewriting. So far as she was concerned, an order to view was a superfluous formality. She was more interested in this Mr. Royds, who, having removed his hat, disclosed a head of sparse iron-grey hair. He spoke like a gentleman, but there was nothing opulent in his appearance. He looked an unlikely purchaser or tenant; but for that matter she had never been able to visualize the sort of person whom the house would suit.

"I'll remove my greatcoat if you don't mind," he said, while Mrs. Park went to a cupboard for another cup and saucer. "The room is warm." He laid the coat across the back of a chair. "Do you live here entirely alone?"

"Yes."

"Aren't you—nervous?"

She looked up sharply.

"Nervous? What is there to be nervous about?"

"I didn't know. Some people cannot bear loneliness. Can you tell me why the house has been on the market all these years?"

Mrs. Park smiled grimly.

"That's easy enough," she said. "It's nobody's house."

"What do you mean—nobody's house?"

"People who can afford to keep up a great house like this generally want land along with it. There isn't any land. People who don't want land can't afford to keep up a house like this. The estate was sold to Major Skirting. He's a house of his own. He's let the land and he's been trying to let or sell the house ever since. I've shown hundreds over but nobody's ever thought twice about taking it."

"Strange. It's a good house. But the land . . . yes, I quite follow you. Whom used it to belong to?"

Mrs. Park set the cup and saucer down upon the table with a rattle.

"A gentleman named Harboys," she said; and suddenly stood rigid, her head a little on one side, in an attitude of listening.

"Do you hear anything?" he asked sharply.

"No. I'll make the tea."

"I suppose you sometimes fancy you hear things?"

She bent over the kettle, giving him no answer. He waited until the teapot was full and then gently repeated the question.

"Hear things?" she repeated with some show of asperity. "No. Why should I?"

"I didn't know. These empty old houses . . ."

"I'm not one of the fanciful sort, sir. . . . Will you help yourself to milk and sugar?"

She let him see that the talk had veered in a direction contrary to her liking. There was veiled fear in her eyes, and, watching her intently, he could see that she was not impervious to loneliness. Here was a woman who suffered more than

she knew. She could bluff her nerves by sheer will-power, but this will-power was steadily losing in the long battle. Mrs. Park was afraid of something, and always, in her inner consciousness, fighting against that fear.

"Thank you," the stranger said, taking the cup and saucer. "Who was this Harboys? Is he still alive?"

"I couldn't say."

"Isn't there some story about the house? Didn't something happen here?"

"I don't know."

"Forgive me. I think you do."

"There are stories . . . You don't need to listen . . ."

She spoke jerkily. Once more he remarked that look in her eyes.

"Tell me," he said gently.

"I can't, sir. If Major Skirting knew I told people I should lose my job. He'd think I was trying to prevent people from taking the house."

"It wouldn't prevent me. Wasn't this Harboys supposed to have shot—"

"Ah!" She set cup and saucer down with a rattle. "Then you've heard something already, sir!"

"A little. You had better tell me all. It will not affect me as a prospective purchaser."

Mrs. Park passed a hand across her forehead.

"I don't like talking about it, sir. You see, I live here all alone. . . ."

She checked herself suddenly, finding herself about to admit to a second person something which she never confessed even to herself.

"Just so," Royds said sympathetically. "And you sometimes hear noises? What noises?"

"Oh, it's imagination," she said. "Or the wind. Sometimes the wind sounds like footsteps and voices, and sometimes I seem to hear . . . It may be a loose door somewhere that bangs."

He leaned forward, his eyes shining with the excitement of some strange fascination.

"You mean you hear a shot fired?" he asked, scarcely above a whisper.

Her one hand resting on the table-cloth contracted nervously.

"I've known it sound like a shot. Oh, I don't believe. . . ."

"They say the house is haunted?" he asked eagerly.

"They say. . . . Oh, when there's been a tragedy happen in a house people will always—"

"Never mind what people say. What do *you* say?" The timbre of his voice had changed; under excitement it had hardened, grown louder. "*Is* the house haunted?"

There was something compelling in Royds' gaze, in the new tone of his voice. She answered him sullenly, helplessly.

"I don't know. I've heard things. I tell myself they're nothing." She groped for a handkerchief. "I've *got* to tell myself they're nothing."

"You haven't—*seen* anything?" he asked in a low, strained voice.

"No, thank God! I never go near the library after dark."

"The library? So it was there. Tell me."

Mrs. Park gulped some tea and replenished her cup with a shaking hand.

"It must have been about twenty years ago," she said in a low and curiously unwilling tone. "The place belonged to a Mr. Gerald Harboys. He was quite young—not much more than thirty, and very well liked. Some said he was a bit queer, but there was a strain of queerness in all the Harboys. Mad on hunting he was, and one of the best riders in these parts. You'll be surprised at the size of the stables when you see them. He had them built.

"He'd married a young wife, one of the Miss Greys from Hornfield Manor, and some say he thought more of her than he did of his horses. She used to ride too, and the pair of them, and Mr. Peter Marsh from Brinkchurch were always together. Harboys and Marsh had known each other since they were in the cradle. Whether there was really anything between Marsh and Mrs. Harboys, I don't know. There's been arguments about that for years, but they're both dead and gone now, and nobody will ever know.

"About one Christmastime Harboys took a fall in the hunting-field and broke his leg, and it was during his convalescence that he got into one of his queer moods. I daresay it was being kept out of the hunting-field which brought it on. His leg mended slowly, and right at the end of January he could only just get about with a stick. Mrs. Harboys followed the hounds every time there was a meet in the neighbourhood and, with her husband unable to get about, she saw more of Peter Marsh than usual. But nobody seemed to know that Mr. Harboys was jealous or that he suspected anything wrong.

"Well, one day at the end of January, Mrs. Harboys went out hunting, and her husband brooded all day over the library fire. During the afternoon he amused himself by cleaning a revolver, which he afterwards laid aside on the mantelpiece within reach. Mrs. Harboys came in just after dark. Peter Marsh had been piloting her, and she brought him with her. While she was ordering tea and poached eggs to be sent up to the morning-room, she sent Peter Marsh into the library to get himself a whisky and tell Mr. Harboys about the day's hunting. He had not been in the library a minute when angry voices were heard and then a shot. The butler then burst into the room and found Peter Marsh lying dead, and Mr. Harboys, still in his chair before the fire, staring wildly at the body, with the revolver in his hand."

She paused, and in the silence she heard Royds breathing heavily. His head was bent and his gaze lowered to the near edge of the table, so that she could scarcely see his face.

"Mr. Harboys," she resumed, "pleaded Not Guilty at the trial and said that his mind was a blank at the time when the shot was fired. He couldn't remember anything that had happened between Marsh coming into the room and then the butler bending over the dead body. His counsel put in a plea for insanity, but the jury would not have it. They found him Guilty and added a recommendation to mercy. The death penalty was changed to penal servitude for life."

She broke off and began to muse, knitting her brows.

"That must be twenty years ago. . . . They let them out after twenty years. He's out already, or soon will be, if he's alive."

Slowly Royds lifted his head and turned burning eyes upon her face.

"And do you think Harboys did it?" he demanded.

The question took Mrs. Park aback.

"Of course! Why! How else could it have happened? There was only those two in the room. It couldn't have happened any other way."

Royds got upon his legs. His pale face was shining with little drops of moisture, his eyes aflame with a strange passion.

"I swear to you," he cried, "that I don't believe Harboys did it. I knew the man——"

Mrs. Park's stare intensified and she uttered a smothered exclamation.

"——I knew him well as child and boy and man. I was at school with Harboys. I tell you he was incapable of murder! All the circumstantial evidence in the world would not weigh an atom with me against my knowledge of his character. They say he had fits of madness. Another lie! But mad or sane he couldn't have done it. He loved his wife—and old Peter Marsh. He knew that they were two of God's best and whitest people. I tell you——"

He broke off suddenly and lowered his voice.

"I'm frightening you," he said. "I didn't mean to. Oh, but think! There's Harboys been rotting in prison these twenty years, remembering nothing of those few dreadful moments. To this day he doesn't know if he's innocent or guilty. Think of it."

Mrs. Park lifted her white face and twitching lips. One hand had stolen to the region of her heart. Each rapid stroke of her pulses seemed to shake her.

"Why have you come here?" she cried in a voice which rose high and querulous with a nameless dread. "You don't want the house! You never intended——"

"No," said Royds, "I came here to find out."

"What?"

"They say strange things happen in the library. I have heard stories. You tell me you have heard footfalls, voices, the sound of a shot. Don't you understand, woman? What happened in the library that evening twenty years ago is known only to God! The man who lives remembers nothing. If it be true that Peter Marsh returns . . . Oh, don't you understand? It is the only way of learning . . . the only way. . . ."

Mrs. Park stood up; her slim body made a barrier between him and the door.

"I can't let you go to the library," she cried, sharply.

"I must. I'm going to spend the night there. I'm going to wait until Peter——"

"I can't let you," she said again.

"But you must. Don't you understand? This means life or death to a man."

She backed almost to the door.

"It's madness!" she cried. "Nobody has ever endured that room after nightfall."

"I will!"

"I shall be sent away if it is found out."

"It won't be found out. I'll recompense you if it is. Here, I came prepared to

pay for the privilege." He tugged a bundle of bank notes roughly out of his breast pocket and flung them on the table. "How much do you want? Five pounds? Ten? Twenty?"

Mrs. Park's gaze lingered on the roll of notes. She knew the value of money. Besides, she was alone in the great house with a man it might be dangerous to thwart.

"Come," said Royds, "here are five five-pound notes. Take them and act like a sensible woman. Then I shall go to the library, and you will make me a fire. Is there any furniture there?"

"No," muttered the woman, her gaze still on the roll of bank notes.

"Then, if you will permit me, I will take a chair."

He picked up the notes again and transferred all of them but five to his breast pocket. With these five he advanced and pressed them into the woman's hand. Her fingers closed over them.

"I'm doing wrong," she muttered.

"You're doing right. I'll get the truth to-night if I have to summon the devil himself. Now come and help me make a fire in the library."

She turned heavily away without a word and went to a cupboard, from the bottom of which she took a bundle of firewood and an old sheet of newspaper, which she dropped on top of the contents of the half-filled scuttle. Then she lit a candle in a brass stick and motioned him towards the door. He picked up a chair as he followed her.

The house was very still as they passed through the kitchen and passages leading to the hall. Their footfalls on the uncarpeted floors rang out sonorously through the hollow shell of the house. To the woman this shattering of a silence which seemed almost sacred was a new weapon put into the hands of Terror. Her overstrained nerves cried out in protest at each of the man's heavy steps. Around her, in the shifting penumbra beyond reach of the candlelight, above her in the empty upper chambers of the house, all manner of sleeping horrors, shapeless abominations of the night-world, seemed to waken and listen and draw near. The silent house seemed full of stealthy movements, and each blotch of darkness was as ambush, peopled by the lewd phantasms of her mind. The man walking behind her seemed to be without nerves, or he had so stimulated them as to bring them entirely under his control.

Evidently he knew the house, for he passed her in the hall taking the lead in the procession of two, and went straight to the library door, which he flung open and passed on the crest of the following candlelight.

The library was a long room in an angle of the house. A long row of windows fronted the hearth, and two more faced the door. The walls were of oak panels stained a mahogany colour, but in that dim light they looked black, as if they were hung with funereal trappings.

The man lingered between the door and the first of the windows while Mrs. Park, half closing her eyes, hurried across to the fireplace with the scuttle. He seemed to be searching for something. Presently he found it.

"There's a hole in one of these panels," he announced.

Mrs. Park's heart gave a leap.

"Yes," she stammered. "It's a—a bullet hole. The shot lodged there after—after—"

"Yes," he said, quietly, "I understand." He crossed the room with a chair and set it down at that corner of the hearth which faced the door and the damaged panel. "And that afternoon, over twenty years ago, I was sitting here—"

There was a crash as the scuttle fell from the woman's hands. All her horror and amazement expressed itself in one thin, muffled scream.

"*You* were sitting there! *You!* Gerald Harboys! Gerald Harboys, the murderer!"

He answered quietly: "Gerald Harboys or Stephen Royds—God help me, what does it matter? Murderer or not—only God knows! But I shall learn to-night. Light that fire, woman, and then leave me."

She left him and stumbled blindly back to the little vulgar room behind the kitchen. But a fascination stronger than terror drew her back to the outside of the library door, there tremblingly to wait and to listen. . . .

Harboys, to give him his real name at the last, settled himself on the chair, and at first busied himself with the building up of the fire. Then he took a revolver from his coat pocket, and placed it upon the mantelpiece within his reach. This done he looked out across the room with a steady gaze.

The firelight wrought strange patterns among the shadows, but in the swiftly changing measures of this shadow-dance he found nothing of what he sought. Presently he began to speak aloud, quietly but very distinctly, so that the shivering woman outside the door brought her hands to her tightening throat.

"Peter, Peter." The tone was almost wheedling. "Can you hear me? I'm sitting in just the same place that I sat that evening, with my bad leg resting on a stool. Here am I, and here's that damned revolver. Now, Peter, won't you come? They say you're always here—that you can't rest because your best friend shot you. Did I shoot you, Peter? My mind's a blank—a blank! For twenty years I have been trying to remember. I have not known peace day and night for twenty years, Peter. Oh, come and tell me! I want to know—to *know*. There's something wrong, Peter. I couldn't have done it. How could I have shot you, boy?"

He relapsed into silence, his gaze never leaving the space between the door and the first window. After a long minute his voice broke out again, choked and almost tearful.

"Is it because you hate me that you won't show yourself, Peter? Was I mad? and did I do it after all? Don't hate me, Peter. I've suffered! Have pity! One way or another I want to end this agony to-night. Oh, God, make him merciful to me! Peter, we'd been friends so long. School . . . don't you remember Wryvern, and those long talks under the lime-trees in the Close on summer nights? And study teas? And going up to Lord's?"

He babbled on, while kaleidoscopic pictures passed before the eyes of his memory. Cool, dewy morning, and the cricket eleven tumbling out of houses for fielding practice; rows of languid boys in dim classrooms and a scratching of pens;

bright sunlight, and white shapes moving on a green sward; crowded touch-lines, and the scrum forming, and goal-posts standing up stark against a grey November sky. In each and all of them he caught a wavering, vanishing glimpse of Peter Marsh.

"Peter!" he cried out again. "Can't you hear me? Won't you come to me? You *do* come back. They all say so. That woman hears you. You—in your scarlet coat, as you came in that evening. I remember . . . when I saw you lying there . . . the blood scarcely showed. I was sitting here waiting for Muriel. I heard you both come up the drive. Muriel was laughing at something. You were both talking to the groom outside. Then I heard you in the hall, and Muriel ordered tea and went upstairs. And I thought: 'She doesn't come in to see me. I'm nothing to her now I'm crocked. It's all Peter, Peter, Peter. By God!' I said, 'I've been blind as well as lame. The things I've seen which they pretended were nothing. . . . The things I haven't seen, but heard of in whispers and hints.' All in a moment my brain caught fire. 'Damn you!' I said, 'I'll teach you to make a cuckold of a lame man!' Then . . . you came in."

The trembling woman outside heard him utter a hoarse cry.

"Peter! Peter! Oh, God, I'm beginning to remember! You stood where you're standing now, touching the handle of the door. That's right! And you said—I remember now—'Give us a peg, Jerry. I'm frozen. There's a devil of an east wind.' Peter! Peter! Don't look like that! I'm remembering . . . remembering. Oh, God, have mercy . . . have mercy!"

A hoarse scream echoed through the room, a chair reeled over with a crash, and then followed a frenzied shouting.

"I remember . . . I remember . . . damn you! when you turned your back on me . . . like that . . ."

A shot rang out; then another. Then silence enfolded Nobody's House, and its one living inmate, a swooning woman, who clung to the oak balustrade.

It was half-an-hour later when Mrs. Park forced herself into the library. The red glow of the fire was still dancing on the walls and floor. For a moment one ruddy gleam seemed to take a fantastic shape—like the prostrate figure of a man in hunting pink.

Harboys lay crumpled and face downwards across the hearth, the revolver still in his hand, the ugly wound in his temple mercifully hidden. To that end had he remembered.

Where there had been a bullet hole in one of the panels, the police next morning found two. They were side by side and scarcely an inch apart.

Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch

THE SEVENTH MAN

from Old Fires and Profitable Ghosts

Charles Scribner's Sons

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In a one-roomed hut, high within the Arctic Circle, and only a little south of the eightieth parallel, six men were sitting—much as they had sat, evening after evening, for months. They had a clock, and by it they divided the hours into day and night. As a matter of fact, it was always night. But the clock said half-past eight, and they called the time evening.

The hut was built of logs, with an inner skin of rough matchboarding, daubed with pitch. It measured seventeen feet by fourteen; but opposite the door four bunks—two above and two below—took a yard off the length, and this made the interior exactly square. Each of these bunks had two doors, with brass latches on the inner side; so that the owner, if he chose, could shut himself up and go to sleep in a sort of cupboard. But as a rule, he closed one of them only—that by his feet. The other swung back, with its brass latch showing. The men kept these latches in a high state of polish.

Across the angle of the wall, to the left of the door, and behind it when it opened, three hammocks were slung, one above another. No one slept in the uppermost.

But the feature of the hut was its fireplace; and this was merely a square hearth-stone, raised slightly above the floor, in the middle of the room. Upon it, and upon a growing mountain of soft grey ash, the fire burned always. It had no chimney, and so the men lost none of its warmth. The smoke ascended steadily and spread itself under the blackened beams and roof-boards in dense blue layers. But about eighteen inches beneath the spring of the roof there ran a line of small trap-doors with sliding panels, to admit the cold air, and below these the room was almost clear of smoke. A newcomer's eyes might have smarted, but these men stitched their clothes and read in comfort. To keep the up-draught steady they had plugged every chink and crevice in the matchboarding below the trap-doors with moss, and payed the seams with pitch. The fire they fed from a stack of drift and wreck-wood piled to the right of the door, and fuel for the fetching strewed the frozen beach outside—whole trees notched into lengths by lumberers' axes and washed thither from they knew not what continent. But

the wreck-wood came from their own ship, the *J. R. MacNeill*, which had brought them from Dundee.

They were Alexander Williamson, of Dundee, better known as the Gaffer; David Faed, also of Dundee; George Lashman, of Cardiff; Long Ede, of Hayle, in Cornwall; Charles Silchester, otherwise the Snipe, of Ratcliff Highway or thereabouts; and Daniel Cooney, shipped at Tromsö six weeks before the wreck, an Irish-American by birth and of no known address.

The Gaffer reclined in his bunk, reading by the light of a smoky and evil-smelling lamp. He had been mate of the *J. R. MacNeill*, and was now captain as well as patriarch of the party. He possessed three books—the Bible, Milton's *Paradise Lost*, and an odd volume of *The Turkish Spy*. Just now he was reading *The Turkish Spy*. The lamplight glinted on the rim of his spectacles and on the silvery hairs in his beard, the slack of which he had tucked under the edge of his blanket. His lips moved as he read, and now and then he broke off to glance mildly at Faed and the Snipe, who were busy beside the fire with a greasy pack of cards; or to listen to the peevish grumbling of Lashman in the bunk below him. Lashman had taken to his bed six weeks before with scurvy, and complained incessantly; and, though they hardly knew it, these complaints were wearing his comrades' nerves to fiddle-strings—doing the mischief that cold and bitter hard work and the cruel loneliness had hitherto failed to do. Long Ede lay stretched by the fire in a bundle of skins, reading in his only book, the Bible, open now at the Song of Solomon. Cooney had finished patching a pair of trousers, and rolled himself in his hammock, whence he stared at the roof and the moonlight streaming up there through the little trap-doors and chivying the layers of smoke. Whenever Lashman broke out into fresh quaverings of self-pity, Cooney's hands opened and shut again, till the nails dug hard into the palm. He groaned at length, exasperated beyond endurance.

"Oh, stow it, George! Hang it all, man! . . ."

He checked himself, sharp and short: repentant, and rebuked by the silence of the others. They were good seamen all, and tender dealing with a sick shipmate was part of their code.

Lashman's voice, more querulous than ever, cut into the silence like a knife:

"That's it. You've thought it for weeks, and now you say it. I've knowed it all along. I'm just an encumbrance, and the sooner you're shut of me the better, says you. You needn't to fret. I'll be soon out of it; out of it—out there, alongside of Bill—"

"Easy there, matey." The Snipe glanced over his shoulder and laid his cards face downward. "Here, let me give the bed a shake up. It'll ease yer."

"It'll make me quiet, you mean. Plucky deal you care about easin' me, any of yer!"

"Get out with yer nonsense! Dan didn't mean it." The Snipe slipped an arm under the invalid's head and rearranged the pillow of skins and gunnybags.

"He didn't, didn't he? Let him say it then . . ."

The Gaffer read on, his lips moving silently. Heaven knows how he had acquired this strayed and stained and filthy little demi-octavo with the arms of

Saumarez on its book-plate—"The Sixth Volume of Letters writ by a Turkish Spy, who liv'd Five-and-Forty Years Undiscovered at Paris: Giving an Impartial Account to the *Divan* at *Constantinople* of the most remarkable Transactions of Europe, And discovering several *Intrigues* and *Secrets* of the *Christian* Courts (especially of that of *France*)," etc., etc. "Written originally in *Arabick*. Translated into *Italian*, and from thence into *English* by the Translator of the First Volume. The Eleventh Edition, London: Printed for G. Strahan, S. Ballard" —and a score of booksellers—"MDCCXLI." Heaven knows why he read it, since he understood about one-half, and admired less than one-tenth. The Oriental reflections struck him as mainly blasphemous. But the Gaffer's religious belief marked down nine-tenths of mankind for perdition: which perhaps made him tolerant. At any rate, he read on gravely between the puffs of his short clay—

. . . *"On the 19th of this Moon, the King and the whole Court were present at a Ballet, representing the grandeur of the* French *monarchy. About the Middle of the Entertainment, there was an Antique Dance perform'd by twelve Masqueraders, in the suppos'd form of* Dæmons. *But before they advanc'd far in their Dance, they found an Interloper amongst 'em, who by encreasing the Number to thirteen, put them quite out of their Measure: for they practise every Step and Motion beforehand, till they are perfect. Being abash'd therefore at the unavoidable Blunders the thirteenth Antique made them commit they stood still like Fools, gazing at one another: None daring to unmask, or speak a Word; for that would have put all the Spectators into a Disorder and Confusion.* Cardinal Mazarini (*who was the chief Contriver of these Entertainments, to divert the King from more serious Thoughts*) *stood close by the young Monarch, with the Scheme of the Ballet in his Hand. Knowing therefore that this Dance was to consist but of twelve Antiques, and taking notice that there were actually thirteen, he at first imputed it to some Mistake. But, afterwards, when he perceived the Confusion of the Dancers, he made a more narrow Enquiry into the Cause of this Disorder. To be brief, they convinced the* Cardinal *that it could be no Error of theirs, by a kind of Demonstration, in that they had but twelve Antique Dresses of that sort, which were made on purpose for this particular Ballet. That which made it seem the greater Mystery was, that when they came behind the Scenes to uncase, and examine the Matter, they found but twelve Antiques, whereas on the Stage there were thirteen . . ."*

"Let him say it. Let him say he didn't mean it, the rotten Irishman!"

Cooney flung a leg wearily over the side of his hammock, jerked himself out, and shuffled across to the sick man's berth.

"Av coorse I didn' mane it. It just took me, ye see, lyin' up yondher and huggin' me thoughts in this—wilderness. I swear to ye, George: and ye'll just wet your throat to show there's no bad blood, and that ye belave me." He took up a pannikin from the floor beside the bunk, pulled a hot iron from the fire, and stirred the frozen drink. The invalid turned his shoulder pettishly. "I didn't mane it," Cooney repeated. He set down the pannikin, and shuffled wearily back to his hammock.

The Gaffer blew a long cloud and stared at the fire; at the smoke mounting

and the grey ash dropping; at David Faed dealing the cards and licking his thumb between each. Long Ede shifted from one cramped elbow to another and pushed his Bible near the blaze, murmuring, "Take us the foxes, the little foxes, that spoil our vines."

"Full hand," the Snipe announced.

"Ay." David Faed rolled the quid in his cheek. The cards were so thumbed and tattered that by the backs of them each player guessed pretty shrewdly what the other held. Yet they went on playing night after night; the Snipe shrilly blessing or cursing his luck, the Scotsman phlegmatic as a bolster.

"Play away, man. What ails ye?" he asked.

The Snipe had dropped both hands to his thighs and sat up, stiff and listening.

"Whist! Outside the door . . ."

All listened. "I hear nothing," said David, after ten seconds.

"Hush, man—listen! There, again . . ."

They heard now. Cooney slipped down from his hammock, stole to the door and listened, crouching, with his ear close to the jamb. The sound resembled breathing—or so he thought for a moment. Then it seemed rather as if some creature were softly feeling about the door—fumbling its coating of ice and frozen snow.

Cooney listened. They all listened. Usually, as soon as they stirred from the scorching circle of the fire, their breath came from them in clouds. It trickled from them now in thin wisps of vapour. They could almost hear the soft grey ash dropping on the hearth.

A log spluttered. Then the invalid's voice clattered in:

"It's the bears—the bears! They've come after Bill, and next it'll be my turn. I warned you—I told you he wasn't deep enough. O Lord, have mercy . . . mercy . . . !" He pattered off into a prayer, his voice and teeth chattering.

"Hush!" commanded the Gaffer gently; and Lashman choked on a sob.

"It ain't bears," Cooney reported, still with his ear to the door. "Leastways . . . we've had bears before. The foxes, maybe . . . let me listen."

Long Ede murmured: "Take us the foxes, the little foxes . . ."

"I believe you're right," the Gaffer announced cheerfully. "A bear would sniff louder—though there's no telling. The snow was falling an hour back, and I dessay 'tis pretty thick outside. If 'tis a bear, we don't want him fooling on the roof, and I misdoubt the drift by the north corner is pretty tall by this time. Is he there still?"

"I felt something then . . . through the chink, here . . . like a warm breath. It's gone now. Come here, Snipe, and listen."

"'Breath,' eh? Did it *smell* like bear?"

"I don't know . . . I didn't smell nothing, to notice. Here, put your head down, close."

The Snipe bent his head. And at that moment the door shook gently. All stared; and saw the latch move up, up . . . and falteringly descend on the staple. They heard the click of it.

The door was secured within by two stout bars. Against these there had been

no pressure. The men waited in a silence that ached. But the latch was not lifted again.

The Snipe, kneeling, looked up at Cooney. Cooney shivered and looked at David Faed. Long Ede, with his back to the fire, softly shook his feet free of the rugs. His eyes searched for the Gaffer's face. But the old man had drawn back into the gloom of his bunk, and the lamplight shone only on a grey fringe of beard. He saw Long Ede's look, though, and answered it quietly as ever.

"Take a brace of guns aloft, and fetch us a look round. Wait, if there's a chance of a shot. The trap works. I tried it this afternoon with the small chisel."

Long Ede lit his pipe, tied down the ear-pieces of his cap, lifted a light ladder off its staples, and set it against a roof-beam: then, with the guns under his arm, quietly mounted. His head and shoulders wavered and grew vague to sight in the smoke-wreaths. "Heard anything more?" he asked. "Nothing since," answered the Snipe. With his shoulder Long Ede pushed up the trap. They saw his head framed in a panel of moonlight, with one frosty star above it. He was wriggling through. "Pitch him up a sleeping-bag, somebody," the Gaffer ordered, and Cooney ran with one. "Thank 'ee, mate," said Long Ede, and closed the trap.

They heard his feet stealthily crunching the frozen stuff across the roof. He was working towards the eaves over-lapping the door. Their breath tightened. They waited for the explosion of his gun. None came. The crunching began again: it was heard down by the very edge of the eaves. It mounted to the blunt ridge overhead; then it ceased.

"He will not have seen aught," David Faed muttered.

"Listen, you. Listen by the door again." They talked in whispers. Nothing; there was nothing to be heard. They crept back to the fire, and stood there warming themselves, keeping their eyes on the latch. It did not move. After a while Cooney slipped off to his hammock; Faed to his bunk, alongside Lashman's. The Gaffer had picked up his book again. The Snipe laid a couple of logs on the blaze, and remained beside it, cowering with his arms stretched out as if to embrace it. His shapeless shadow wavered up and down on the bunks behind him; and, across the fire, he still stared at the latch.

Suddenly the sick man's voice quavered out:

"It's not him they want—it's Bill! They're after Bill, out there! That was Bill trying to get in. . . . Why didn't yer open? It was Bill, I tell yer!"

At the first word the Snipe had wheeled right-about-face, and stood now, pointing, and shaking like a man with ague.

"Matey . . . for the love of God . . ."

"I won't hush. There's something wrong here to-night. I can't sleep. It's Bill, I tell yer. See his poor hammock up there shaking. . . ."

Cooney tumbled out with an oath and a thud. "Hush it, you white-livered swine! Hush it, or by—" His hand went behind him to his knife-sheath.

"Dan Cooney"—the Gaffer closed his book and leaned out—"go back to your bed."

"I won't, Sir. Not unless—"

"Go back."

"Flesh and blood—"

"Go back." And for the third time that night Cooney went back.

The Gaffer leaned a little farther over the ledge, and addressed the sick man.

"George, I went to Bill's grave not six hours agone. The snow on it wasn't even disturbed. Neither beast nor man, but only God, can break up the hard earth he lies under. I tell you that, and you may lay to it. Now go to sleep."

. . . . . .

Long Ede crouched on the frozen ridge of the hut, with his feet in the sleeping-bag, his knees drawn up, and the two guns laid across them. The creature, whatever its name, that had tried the door, was nowhere to be seen; but he decided to wait a few minutes on the chance of a shot; that is, until the cold should drive him below. For the moment the clear tingling air was doing him good. The truth was Long Ede had begun to be afraid of himself, and the way his mind had been running for the last forty-eight hours upon green fields and visions of spring. As he put it to himself, something inside his head was melting. Biblical texts chattered within him like running brooks, and as they fleeted he could almost smell the blown meadow-scent. "Take us the foxes, the little foxes . . . for our vines have tender grapes. . . . A fountain of gardens, a well of living waters, and streams from Lebanon . . . Awake, O north wind, and come, thou south . . . blow upon my garden, that the spices thereof may flow out. . . ." He was light-headed, and he knew it. He must hold out. They were all going mad; were, in fact, three parts crazed already, all except the Gaffer. And the Gaffer relied on him as his right-hand man. One glimpse of the returning sun—one glimpse only—might save them yet.

He gazed out over the frozen hills, and northward across the ice-pack. A few streaks of pale violet—the ghost of the Aurora—fronted the moon. He could see for miles. Bear or fox, no living creature was in sight. But who could tell what might be hiding behind any one of a thousand hummocks? He listened. He heard the slow grinding of the ice-pack off the beach: only that. "Take us the foxes, the little foxes . . ."

This would never do. He must climb down and walk briskly, or return to the hut. Maybe there was a bear, after all, behind one of the hummocks, and a shot, or the chance of one, would scatter his head clear of these tom-fooling notions. He would have a search round.

What was that, moving . . . on a hummock, not five hundred yards away? He leaned forward to gaze.

Nothing now: but he had seen something. He lowered himself to the eaves by the north corner, and from the eaves to the drift piled there. The drift was frozen solid, but for a treacherous crust of fresh snow. His foot slipped upon this, and down he slid of a heap.

Luckily he had been careful to sling the guns tightly at his back. He picked himself up, and unstrapping one, took a step into the bright moonlight to examine the nipples; took two steps: and stood stock-still.

There, before him, on the frozen coat of snow, was a footprint. No: two, three,

four—many footprints: prints of a naked human foot: right foot, left foot, both naked, and blood in each print—a little smear.

It had come, then. He was mad for certain. He saw them: he put his fingers in them; touched the frozen blood. The snow before the door was trodden thick with them—some going, some returning.

"The latch . . . lifted. . . ." Suddenly he recalled the figure he had seen moving upon the hummock, and with a groan he set his face northward and gave chase. Oh, he was mad for certain! He ran like a madman—floundering, slipping, plunging in his clumsy moccasins. "Take us the foxes, the little foxes . . . My beloved put in his hand by the hole of the door, and my bowels were moved for him . . . I charge you, O daughters of Jerusalem . . . I charge you . . . I charge you . . ."

He ran thus for three hundred yards maybe, and then stopped as suddenly as he had started.

His mates—they must not see these footprints, or they would go mad too: mad as he. No, he must cover them up, all within sight of the hut. And to-morrow he would come alone, and cover those farther afield. Slowly he retraced his steps. The footprints—those which pointed towards the hut and those which pointed away from it—lay close together; and he knelt before each, breaking fresh snow over the hollows and carefully hiding the blood. And now a great happiness filled his heart; interrupted once or twice as he worked by a feeling that someone was following and watching him. Once he turned northwards and gazed, making a telescope of his hands. He saw nothing, and fell again to his long task.

. . . . . .

Within the hut the sick man cried softly to himself. Faed, the Snipe, and Cooney slept uneasily, and muttered in their dreams. The Gaffer lay awake, thinking. After Bill, George Lashman; and after George . . . ? Who next? And who would be the last—the unburied one? The men were weakening fast; their wits and courage coming down at the end with a rush. Faed and Long Ede were the only two to be depended on for a day. The Gaffer liked Long Ede, who was a religious man. Indeed he had a growing suspicion that Long Ede, in spite of some amiable laxities of belief, was numbered among the Elect: or might be, if interceded for. The Gaffer began to intercede for him silently; but experience had taught him that such "wrestlings," to be effective, must be noisy, and he dropped off to sleep with a sense of failure. . . .

The Snipe stretched himself, yawned, and awoke. It was seven in the morning: time to prepare a cup of tea. He tossed an armful of logs on the fire, and the noise awoke the Gaffer, who at once inquired for Long Ede. He had not returned. "Go you up to the roof. The lad must be frozen." The Snipe climbed the ladder, pushed open the trap, and came back, reporting that Long Ede was nowhere to be seen. The old man slipped a jumper over his suits of clothing—already three deep—reached for a gun, and moved to the door. "Take a cup of something warm to fortify," the Snipe advised. "The kettle won't be five minutes

boiling." But the Gaffer pushed up the heavy bolts and dragged the door open.

"What in the . . . ! Here, bear a hand, lads!"

Long Ede lay prone before the threshold, his outstretched hands almost touching it, his moccasins already covered out of sight by the powdery snow which ran and trickled incessantly—trickled between his long, dishevelled locks, and over the back of his gloves, and ran in a thin stream past the Gaffer's feet.

They carried him in and laid him on a heap of skins by the fire. They forced rum between his clenched teeth and beat his hands and feet, and kneaded and rubbed him. A sigh fluttered on his lips: something between a sigh and a smile, half seen, half heard. His eyes opened, and his comrades saw that it was really a smile.

"Wot cheer, mate?" It was the Snipe who asked.

"I—I seen . . ." The voice broke off, but he was smiling still.

What had he seen? Not the sun, surely! By the Gaffer's reckoning the sun would not be due for a week or two yet: how many weeks he could not say precisely, and sometimes he was glad enough that he did not know.

They forced him to drink a couple of spoonfuls of rum, and wrapped him up warmly. Each man contributed some of his own bedding. Then the Gaffer called to morning prayers, and the three sound men dropped on their knees with him. Now, whether by reason of their joy at Long Ede's recovery, or because the old man was in splendid voice, they felt their hearts uplifted that morning with a cheerfulness they had not known for months. Long Ede lay and listened dreamily while the passion of the Gaffer's thanksgiving shook the hut. His gaze wandered over their bowed forms—"The Gaffer, David Faed, Dan Cooney, the Snipe, and—and George Lashman in his bunk, of course—and me." But, then, *who was the seventh?* He began to count. "There's myself—Lashman, in his bunk—David Faed, the Gaffer, the Snipe, Dan Cooney . . . One, two, three, four—well but that made *seven*. Then who was the seventh? Was it George who had crawled out of bed and was kneeling there? Decidedly there were five kneeling. No: there was George, plain enough, in his berth, and not able to move. Then who was the stranger? Wrong again: there was no stranger. He knew all these men—they were his mates. Was it—Bill? No, Bill was dead and buried: none of these was Bill, or like Bill. Try again—One, two, three, four, five—and us two sick men, seven. The Gaffer, David Faed, Dan Cooney—have I counted Dan twice? No, that's Dan, yonder to the right, and only one of him. Five men kneeling, and two on their backs: that makes seven every time. Dear God—suppose—"

The Gaffer ceased, and, in the act of rising from his knees, caught sight of Long Ede's face. While the others fetched their breakfast-cans, he stepped over, and bent and whispered:

"Tell me. Ye've seen what?"

"Seen?" Long Ede echoed.

"Ay, seen what? Speak low—was it the sun?"

"The s—" But this time the echo died on his lips, and his face grew full of awe uncomprehending. It frightened the Gaffer.

"Ye'll be the better of a snatch of sleep," said he; and was turning to go, when Long Ede stirred a hand under the edge of his rugs.

"Seven . . . count . . ." he whispered.

"Lord have mercy upon us!" the Gaffer muttered to his beard as he moved away. "Long Ede; gone crazed!"

And yet, though an hour or two ago this had been the worst that could befall, the Gaffer felt unusually cheerful. As for the others, they were like different men, all that day and through the three days that followed. Even Lashman ceased to complain, and, unless their eyes played them a trick, had taken a turn for the better. "I declare, if I don't feel like pitching to sing!" the Snipe announced on the second evening, as much to his own wonder as to theirs. "Then why in thunder don't you strike up?" answered Dan Cooney, and fetched his concertina. The Snipe struck up, then and there—"Villikins and his Dinah!" What is more, the Gaffer looked up from his *Paradise Lost*, and joined in the chorus.

By the end of the second day, Long Ede was up and active again. He went about with a dazed look in his eyes. He was counting, counting to himself, always counting. The Gaffer watched him furtively.

Since his recovery, though his lips moved frequently, Long Ede had scarcely uttered a word. But towards noon on the fourth day he said an extraordinary thing:

"There's that sleeping-bag I took with me the other night. I wonder if 'tis on the roof still. It will be froze pretty stiff by this. You might nip up and see, Snipe, and"—he paused—"if you find it, stow it up yonder on Bill's hammock."

The Gaffer opened his mouth, but shut it again without speaking. The Snipe went up the ladder.

A minute passed; and then they heard a cry from the roof—a cry that fetched them all trembling, choking, weeping, cheering, to the foot of the ladder.

"Boys! boys!—the Sun!"

. . . . . .

Months later—it was June, and even George Lashman had recovered his strength—the Snipe came running with news of the whaling fleet. And on the beach, as they watched the vessels come to anchor, Long Ede told the Gaffer his story: "It was a hall—a hallu—what d'ye call it, I reckon. I was crazed, eh?" The Gaffer's eyes wandered from a brambling hopping about the lichen-covered boulders, and away to the sea-fowl wheeling above the ships: and then came into his mind a tale he had read once in *The Turkish Spy*. "I wouldn't say just that," he answered slowly.

"Anyway," said Long Ede, "I believe the Lord sent a miracle to save us all."

"I wouldn't say just that, either," the Gaffer objected. "I doubt it was meant just for you and me, and the rest were presairved, as you might say incidentally."

Naomi Royde-Smith

PROOF

from LAND AND WATER

1919

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Nobody ever wondered why the Blundells came to marry each other, because Agnes Blundell, who had a little surface charm and no reticences, told new acquaintances all about it in the first half-hour. This habit of hers was recognised as a joke among their acquaintances. As Blundell's reputation grew, some of his friends took it rather more seriously.

In the summer of 1914 young George Poyster and little Benfleet, who had never met the Blundells before, were asked to Ranmore for the same week-end, and each bet the other five pounds that he would evade Mrs. Blundell's famous recital. Hugh Ormsby held the stakes. He had just got his private secretaryship and was working with Blundell on the administration of the Home Secretary's new Bill. He was drawn into the affair before he'd quite realised what it was all about, and Sunday afternoon found him feeling like the worst kind of traitor.

Most of the house party had joined in the betting, and there was a great deal of money on Benfleet, of whom Agnes Blundell was taking no notice. Ormsby always believed that Lady Denham guessed how her party was amusing itself. If she did she certainly disapproved. Anyway, she sent Agnes and Benfleet off together after tea to church at Pinfolds. It is a seven-mile drive to Pinfolds, and the effect of evensong, sunset, and "The day Thou gavest" on Agnes made assurance doubly sure. Benfleet told us afterwards that he had kept it off till the return journey.

George Poyster, rich and relieved, for he had not in the least wanted to be told, asked what the story was, and he was given it in chorus and antiphone.

"By George!" said little Benfleet as the phrases rattled round him. "That's just what she did say, called him her dear old bear, said she was fastidious to a fault. That's why she'd never married before. Does she always tell it that way?"

Ormsby was glad to escape into the garden with his shame, under cover of the uproar that answered Benfleet.

Mr. and Mrs. Blundell were walking together on the terrace. As Ormsby joined them—he couldn't have avoided it, coming as he did straight through the library window—Agnes Blundell's plaintive voice was reiterating an acrimonious note:

". . . and, after all, Graham, I *am* your wife." His reply: "But, my dear girl,

that has nothing to do with it. I am not allowed to tell *any* one," reached Hugh before they saw him. But Agnes drew no veil.

"Graham is *so* secretive, Mr. Ormsby. I know he knows what the Home Secretary is going to do with that fascinating de Lorges; I expect you do too," and the horrified young man, shaken, wounded even, to the quick of his earnest, self-conscious discretion, almost admitted that he did.

It was probably from the dizzy moment when he might have told (a weakness she must have divined, though she never actually profited by it) that Hugh began to hate Agnes Blundell. Till then he had only disliked and avoided her. We all knew that he worshipped Graham. Some of us were grateful to the boy for the passionate correctness of the atmosphere with which he surrounded his chief. It seemed to compensate, not too belatedly we might hope, for that long tale of small annoying leakages which had clouded Blundell's career. Until that night on the terrace at Ranmore Hugh had shared the general belief that Graham could and habitually did withstand her inquisitive and loquacious egoism. There had only been one occasion when it was clear that he must have talked. It happened during the second year of their marriage. The matter was hushed up, the leakage was indeed only of minor importance, but it cost Blundell the promotion which was then due to him. That was ten years before Hugh came down from Oxford and passed brilliantly into the Civil Service as Blundell had done before him.

But that evening Hugh thought he had heard a note of defeat in Blundell's patient voice. "My dear girl," it sighed in his drowsy ears as he lay awake through the green twilight of the mid-summer small hours, "that has nothing to do with it—nothing to do with it," and then desperately, ashamedly, "I am not allowed to tell *any* one." He had said it; he must have said it so often before—"hundreds of times," shivered poor Hugh, turning on his pillow.

At breakfast next morning Agnes was coquettish.

"Oh, Mr. Ormsby," she rolled her fine eyes at him, "you *were* discreet last night! Wait till you are married!" She developed the theme on the journey back to town, having announced to Ormsby's mute dismay that he was to see her safely home. "Part of your official duty. Graham is motoring up with Sir Edward Denham, so you will have to look after poor little me. Graham wouldn't be happy if he didn't know how well you do it. He *cares* so, still, after all these years. Isn't it odd?"

When he put her into the taxi at Victoria, Mrs. Blundell gave him the address of a fashionable sorcerer. "No, no, *not* a palmist, a psychometrist. He holds things—letters, handkerchiefs, buttons, anything—and tells me the most *wonderful* things about them. I always go straight to him when I've been staying away or am in any difficulty. Mr. Ormsby"—and she leant over the closed door—"would you get me a letter—an envelope even—of de Lorges'? You must have crowds of them in his dossier."

"And that woman must be forty if she's an hour," thought Hugh as he reeled away. He was still in those early twenties when it seems that age ought to bring

wisdom. But he was wrong. Agnes was only six months older than her husband, and Blundell would be thirty-eight that July.

It was, as a matter of fact, on his birthday a few weeks later that Graham Blundell met Edie Pitland. She was half-sister of that mysterious little beauty whom Sir James Holsworthy married so suddenly, and who certainly ought to have been in musical comedy, though no one had ever seen her on any stage. All that was known of Lady Holsworthy's past was uncertain, even her maiden name. It might, of course, have been Pitland, but Edie was only her half-sister, and Edie was only seen occasionally during her holidays, which were always spent at Holsworthy House. The girl stayed there generally alone, for the Holsworthys only went to Devonshire in August.

It was not easy to question Edie. It wasn't that she wouldn't answer questions, but her answers never seemed to lead to any definite story, and no one was allowed to talk with her for long. Lady Holsworthy needed the undivided attention of all her guests, if only to pick up the "h's" she dropped so softly and unexpectedly from her pretty, careful speech. Edie's "h's" were quite safe. Indeed, her quiet pose; the queer radiance of her absorption in a world of her own; the unresentful dignity of her "Good night, Madeleine," when she was sent to bed—or at any rate to a solitary schoolroom dinner, she a tall nineteen with her hair up—only made the puzzle harder. Madeleine Holsworthy was so like a canary that it was possible to believe she really had forgotten who and where and what she was five years ago: but Edie's candour was not without shrewdness, and her silences were as intelligent as her speech was easy and graceful. It is difficult to suppose that she did not tell Blundell all she knew of herself and of the sister by whose beauty she was so visibly dazzled, before they parted, but she certainly confided in no other friend.

Blundell did not know the Holsworthys, and they were still in London when he went down to Hunter's Inn for a fortnight's golf in the first week of July. Agnes was doing her annual rest-and-beauty cure in the seclusion of a fashionable and very expensive toilet specialist's After-Season Retreat. As she explained loud and wide every year, "I owe it to Graham to keep my complexion and figure *perfect;* but he does miss me so dreadfully. He writes every day, sometimes twice a day, like Cyrano de Bergerac. I wire if there is no letter from him on my breakfast tray."

Graham used this yearly liberty to make notes and photographs for his studies of wild-bird life which appeared occasionally in *Scribner's.*

On the morning of his birthday he woke rather earlier than usual after a very vivid dream. As a rule he slept soundly and had no memory of dreaming that outlasted his bath. Agnes's voluble records of astounding visions and prophetic warnings given to her in sleep had bred in him an active avoidance of the whole subject of dreams, an evasion which extended to his thoughts of his own rare experiences. But this particular dream was pleasant and clear. He remembered it with interest as he shaved. The cliff path which he had followed in his dreams till it brought him to a ledge where a sea gull was standing beside a nest scream-

ingly full of newly-hatched youngsters was, in its beginning, the track he had noticed above Watermouth three days before. It wanted two hours to breakfast-time when he was dressed, and the morning light was perfect for photography on the north cliff. It amused him to go out to the place he had seen so clearly in sleep.

He reached the place and found the nest and the parent bird so exactly as he had dreamed them that his mind went wondering beneath his careful attention, absorbed in manipulating lens and shutter, to know whether he were not dreaming still.

The click of the exposure sent the great black-back wheeling down to the water in slow, narrowing planes between the walls of cliff that held the little bay. When he had watched the gull settle beyond the wash of the incoming tide, Graham turned and saw Edie Pitland at his elbow, watching too.

"I've just dreamt that someone was photographing Blackie's third family," she said.

Afterwards, when he told Hugh (and it was eventually imperative to tell someone), Graham confessed that for one moment he had revolted against the miasmic suggestion that he too had participated in some abhorred occult prevision. It was like an echo of Agnes. "I'm so terribly psychic, you know. I seem to feel everything that's going to happen to me." He felt that she was poisoning the truth of the clear morning for him with the mendacities of her scented curtained sleep.

But Edie's magic was a swift antidote. After her first smiling acknowledgment of the dream as an introduction to this stranger, her interest was all for his business. They climbed together to a place secure and reasonably hidden, where they watched for the appearance of the arrant mother.

"I made this frock myself," she told him, "because all my other morning ones are pink or white, and of course that frightens them away. I found this stuff at a little draper's by the bridge at Barnstaple. Wasn't it luck!"

There are among Blundell's papers photographs of hawks' nests, of gulls asleep and on the wing; of many birds busied about their private lives, marked "Culborne" and "Oare," "Shallowford" and "Woodhanger" in Edie's round, unformed writing, and two snapshots of Edie herself, tall and wind-blown in the home-made, neutral-coloured frock, taken, one at Desolate, the other on Ilkerton Bridge, and dated by Blundell, "St. James's Day, 1914." Other records of that fortnight there are none. Blundell burned all her letters before he went with his regiment to Flanders in 1917.

St. James's Day fell on the last Saturday of July in the year of the War, and in the late afternoon of that day Blundell was telegraphed for to return to Whitehall. He drove to Minehead in the early hours of Sunday morning to get the London train. Edie went with him as far as Porlock Weir, where they changed horses and had breakfast together. She probably walked back to Lynmouth alone. She was young and strong and a great walker.

A month later she was doing V.A.D. work at the Exeter hospital, and early

in November, 1916, she died of Mediterranean fever in Malta. Hugh Ormsby, who saw her in London before she left, thought her the loveliest thing alive, but the photograph Lady Holsworthy sent to all the papers with a little account of her work and death shows a rather severe young face unbecomingly surrounded by the hat and uniform coat of a Red Cross official. Blundell's snapshots give nothing more definite than the grace of the girl's pose in an arrested movement.

It was because of the letters that Hugh had to be told. What exactly Blundell said to Edie to persuade her to secrecy Hugh never heard. Possibly he laid the excuse on his long hours (in those early weeks he often slept at the Home Office) and on the possible confusion between private and official correspondence. But whatever he said, it was successful, and Edie's few letters were addressed to him under cover to his private secretary.

Hugh took a deep though smothered pleasure in the knowledge that here was something he could hide from Agnes. His love for Graham and the one sight he had had of Edie had been enough to vanquish any flickering doubt or possible scruple about serving him in this un-official direction.

So, when the news came from Malta it was to Hugh that the envelope containing Edie's last faintly pencilled message to Blundell was addressed by the nurse, who enclosed it in a kind, discreet official note.

"I don't quite know for whom she meant this," wrote the good woman, "but as it seems to be a quotation from the classics, I send it to you and not to Lady Holsworthy."

Hugh, setting his teeth, had offered to take Agnes to the Russian Ballet that night, and had by his assiduity during the next few days in providing amusement and distraction for her at Graham's free hours, aroused an only too readily kindled relief.

"That ridiculous boy is falling in love with me," she proclaimed, "and my dear old bear is too sure of me to be jealous, but I'm afraid I may really have to tell him in self-protection. Cæsar's wife, you know."

At the end of a week she confided to Hugh that Graham was sleeping badly.

"I am so sensitive I lie awake in the next room and *feel* him awake, too. I go in several times during the night to see how he is getting on, just as if he were indeed my—little—baby." It was in this way—softly and with a pause between each word—that Agnes had lately begun referring to the fact that she had for years refused to have a child.

"I am afraid he's keeping something from me," she said a day or two later. "I wish I knew what it was," and Hugh went blind for a moment with the vision of Edie's pale face and eyes as she came to him after saying good-bye to Graham the day she crossed to France.

"After all," Agnes went on in the voice he had heard at Ranmore, "I am his wife. I ought to know. But I'm sure to find out."

Then she had an idea. "I think he must be grieving for some one who's been killed in this horrible war. But he's grown very secretive. It would do him so much *good* to talk about it. I shall persuade him to go to one of dear Mrs.

Bartram's séances. She has been almost miraculously successful in recalling the souls of those who have passed over to console their dear ones. Indeed, dear Hugh, one of the lessons of this awful time is—don't you feel it?—that there is, there *can* be no death."

After this Hugh spoke to Graham. He had all the conventional young man's contempt for such experiments as were beginning to make Mrs. Bartram's Sunday evenings notorious; but there was no doubt that some queer things did happen in her drawing-room, and, if any of the tales which the most unexpected people told were true, there was ground for believing that it was possible, at any rate for the quite recently dead, to make some sign to the living who demanded it. Hugh did not like the idea, and he wouldn't have had anything to do with it for himself: but he was afraid of what might happen if Agnes, who certainly was a bit odd with her dreams and intuitions, were to put her suggestion into practice. Graham's state, too, was causing him deep anxiety, and Hugh privately agreed with Agnes that it might do him good to be made to talk.

After the first heartbreaking attempts at opening the subject had been accomplished, Graham gave way. Hugh, dumb with pity and apprehension, listened to Blundell's hungering thoughts as his desires drove him towards the very dangers against which it had been his hope to warn him. For the first time there was open speech from Graham. Hugh had done what he was asked to do and known no more than he couldn't help seeing. Now he heard all, even the tale of the gull's nest and Edie's grey-brown frock.

"I expect it was a hideous thing really, badly made and an unbecoming colour; but wasn't it a lovely child that wore it, and for a lovely reason? She'd meet me somewhere on the moors and lie curled up in the bracken close to the path, so that I'd almost tread on her as I came, the colour hid her so. How can she be dead? She was so near to Life, not hidden away from it by herself and all the gossip and furniture that our women crowd among. You'd think nothing could quench her, she was so clear and strong. And I never told her that I'd have given her the whole world. I told her nothing. We were just together, and now I feel that I cheated her by not saying what it was her right to know. She was so—no, it isn't humble, so much interested away from herself she couldn't have guessed what she was to me—what she must have been to any man who knew her as I did. I'd spent so many years appeasing Agnes with words that meant nothing, that I wouldn't say what I was meaning, for the first time in my life, even when we said good-bye. It wasn't that I felt I had no right to tell her. I had as much right to tell her as she had to know what she was to me. If I could tell her now I would. I'd even go to that witches' kitchen in Marlborough Road if I thought it would give her one minute's joy. But she'd not come there of her own free will. And if I had the power I'd not drag her back from whatever place she is making holy now. She'd not have died if she couldn't have done without me. I've thought of it again and again. Suppose I did go? And suppose my going again let Agnes in? She'd question God, or the devil, if she thought they knew a secret that she could spread broadcast. I'm so mad I looked up the story of Saul and the witch. What do you think was the first thing the poor old spook

said when she had raised him? 'Why hast thou disquieted me to bring me up?' Edie might say that. . . . There'd be no hope in Death if it were sure that we could be made to give answers out of our graves."

That night Hugh took Agnes to *The Boy* for the second time. "I simply scream at Berry," she said. "Thank Heaven I have a sense of humour."

When Blundell had at last freed himself from Whitehall and gone to France, and, after the fashion of desperate men, was coming untouched through the worst fighting, Hugh began to realise that there were others beside himself who took a grave view of the case. Sir Edward Denham, missing his astute and competent aid, muttered, "Poor fellow! Poor fellow! He will be much happier away."

When the news that Blundell had been killed during an air-raid came through it provoked references to the celibacy of the blessed from the most unexpected people. It seemed to Hugh that those who really cared for Blundell were glad he was dead.

Agnes was really overcome with grief for a week. But by the time Graham's kit reached London she was exacting daily sympathy from Hugh, and quoting the condolences he hated himself for giving to anyone who had time to listen to her. Graham had carried a pocketbook containing her photograph, and a rather large piece of white heather she had bought for him in Bond Street. In another pocket, so wrote the chaplain who was with him when he died, they found a small photograph of a gull's nest on a ledge of rock above the sea. Graham had asked for it and had scrawled some words on it when he could speak no longer: "*Hieme et aestate, et prope et procul, usque dum vivam et ultra.*"

"This seems to be poetry," said Agnes. "Can you explain it to me?"

"It isn't verse," said Hugh. "I expect he was delirious."

But Agnes persisted and when Hugh had translated it she was satisfied that she had Graham's dying message to herself.

"*Et ultra,*" she said, "an injunction I *dare* not ignore." And then, "I cannot remember when he took that photograph, but I am sure Graham had some association with it I ought to treasure now. I shall have it psychometrised and find out."

A fortnight later she telephoned to Hugh.

"I have something too wonderful to show you. You must come to me this evening."

In the blue-and-purple room she called her den, Agnes was sitting, pale among her gold-fringed cushions. She swept to welcome Hugh, dizzying him with a whirl of silken scarves heavy with odours.

"Dear Graham," she said. "It has been so like him to make difficulties. We have had no end of delay in getting through to him. But last night a new medium, who is perfectly marvellous with planchette, secured a control as soon as I asked for Graham. 'I am his wife,' I kept saying. 'Tell him I *must* know all about the sea gulls and the Latin message.' And at last I have proof that my darling has heard and is answering me. Look!"

To Hugh the wavering, serrated line that hurried down the paper she drew from her bosom seemed the very register of anguished resistance. Half-way down the page it steadied, and in a clear and legible script, a hand which he could not deny to be as nearly Graham's as any pencilled note of his he had ever seen, stood out the words:

But I am not allowed to tell anyone.

"That's what he always said just before he did tell me things," Agnes cooed. "Now I know I shall find out so much. We are having a special private sitting here to-morrow. It is so *wonderful* to have this proof that my love can reach him still."

Walter de la Mare

SEATON'S AUNT

from The Riddle

Alfred A. Knopf

Permission to reprint is granted through James B. Pinker & Son

I had heard rumours of Seaton's Aunt long before I actually encountered her. Seaton, in the hush of confidence, or at any little show of toleration on our part, would remark, "My aunt," or "My old aunt, you know," as if his relative might be a kind of cement to an *entente cordiale*.

He had an unusual quantity of pocket-money; or, at any rate, it was bestowed on him in unusually large amounts; and he spent it freely, though none of us would have described him as an "awfully generous chap." "Hullo, Seaton," we would say, "the old Begum?" At the beginning of term, too, he used to bring back surprising and exotic dainties in a box with a trick padlock that accompanied him from his first appearance at Gummidge's in a billy-cock hat to the rather abrupt conclusion of his schooldays.

From a boy's point of view he looked distastefully foreign, with his yellow skin, and slow chocolate-coloured eyes, and lean weak figure. Merely for his looks he was treated by most of us true-blue Englishmen with condescension, hostility, or contempt. We used to call him "Pongo," but without any much better excuse for the nickname than his skin. He was, that is, in one sense of the term what he assuredly was not in the other sense—a sport.

Seaton and I, as I may say, were never in any sense intimate at school; our orbits only intersected in class. I kept deliberately aloof from him. I felt vaguely he was a sneak, and remained quite unmollified by advances on his side, which,

in a boy's barbarous fashion, unless it suited me to be magnanimous, I haughtily ignored.

We were both of us quick-footed, and at Prisoner's Base used occasionally to hide together. And so I best remember Seaton—his narrow watchful face in the dusk of a summer evening; his peculiar crouch, and his inarticulate whisperings and mumblings. Otherwise he played all games slackly and limply; used to stand and feed at his locker with a crony or two until his "tuck" gave out; or waste his money on some outlandish fancy or other. He bought, for instance, a silver bangle, which he wore above his left elbow, until some of the fellows showed their masterly contempt of the practice by dropping it nearly red-hot down his back.

It needed, therefore, a rather peculiar taste, a rather rare kind of schoolboy courage and indifference to criticism, to be much associated with him. And I had neither the taste nor, perhaps, the courage. None the less, he did make advances, and on one memorable occasion went to the length of bestowing on me a whole pot of some outlandish mulberry-coloured jelly that had been duplicated in his term's supplies. In the exuberance of my gratitude I promised to spend the next half-term holiday with him at his aunt's house.

I had clean forgotten my promise when, two or three days before the holiday, he came up and triumphantly reminded me of it.

"Well, to tell you the honest truth, Seaton, old chap—" I began graciously; but he cut me short.

"My aunt expects you," he said; "she is very glad you are coming. She's sure to be quite decent to *you*, Withers."

I looked at him in sheer astonishment; the emphasis was so uncalled for. It seemed to suggest an aunt not hitherto hinted at, and a friendly feeling on Seaton's side that was far more disconcerting than welcome.

We reached his home partly by train, partly by a lift in an empty farm-cart, and partly by walking. It was a whole-day holiday, and we were to sleep the night; he lent me extraordinary nightgear, I remember. The village street was unusually wide, and was fed from a green by two converging roads, with an inn, and a high green sign at the corner. About a hundred yards down the street was a chemist's shop—a Mr. Tanner's. We descended the two steps into his dusky and odorous interior to buy, I remember, some rat poison. A little beyond the chemist's was the forge. You then walked along a very narrow path, under a fairly high wall, nodding here and there with weeds and tufts of grass, and so came to the iron garden-gates, and saw the high, flat house behind its huge sycamore. A coach-house stood on the left of the house, and on the right a gate led into a kind of rambling orchard. The lawn lay away over to the left again, and at the bottom (for the whole garden sloped gently to a sluggish and rushy pond-like stream) was a meadow.

We arrived at noon, and entered the gates out of the hot dust beneath the glitter of the dark-curtained windows. Seaton led me at once through the little garden-gate to show me his tadpole pond, swarming with what (being myself

not in the least interested in low life) I considered the most horrible creatures —of all shapes, consistencies and sizes, but with whom Seaton seemed to be on the most intimate of terms. I can see his absorbed face now as he sat on his heels and fished the slimy things out in his sallow palms. Wearying at last of these pets, we loitered about awhile in an aimless fashion. Seaton seemed to be listening, or at any rate waiting, for something to happen or for someone to come. But nothing did happen and no one came.

That was just like Seaton. Anyhow, the first view I got of his aunt was when, at the summons of a distant gong, we turned from the garden, very hungry and thirsty, to go in to luncheon. We were approaching the house when Seaton suddenly came to a standstill. Indeed, I have always had the impression that he plucked at my sleeve. Something, at least, seemed to catch me back, as it were, as he cried, "Look out, there she is!"

She was standing at an upper window which opened wide on a hinge, and at first sight she looked an excessively tall and overwhelming figure. This, however, was mainly because the window reached all but to the floor of the bedroom. She was in reality rather an under-sized woman, in spite of her long face and big head. She must have stood, I think, unusually still, with eyes fixed on us, though this impression may be due to Seaton's sudden warning and to my consciousness of the cautious and subdued air that had fallen on him at sight of her. I know that, without the least reason in the world, I felt a kind of guiltiness, as if I had been "caught." There was a silvery star pattern sprinkled on her black silk dress, and even from the ground I could see the immense coils of her hair and the rings on her left hand which was held fingering the small jet buttons of her bodice. She watched our united advance without stirring, until, imperceptibly, her eyes raised and lost themselves in the distance, so that it was out of an assumed reverie that she appeared suddenly to awaken to our presence beneath her when we drew close to the house.

"So this is your friend Mr. Smithers, I suppose?" she said, bobbing to me.

"Withers, aunt," said Seaton.

"It's much the same," she said, with eyes fixed on me. "Come in, Mr. Withers, and bring him along with you."

She continued to gaze at me—at least, I think she did so. I know that the fixity of her scrutiny and her ironical "Mr." made me feel peculiarly uncomfortable. None the less she was extremely kind and attentive to me, though, no doubt, her kindness and attention showed up more vividly against her complete neglect of Seaton. Only one remark that I have any recollection of she made to him: "When I look on my nephew, Mr. Smithers, I realise that dust we are, and dust shall become. You are hot, dirty, and incorrigible, Arthur."

She sat at the head of the table, Seaton at the foot, and I, before a wide waste of damask tablecloth, between them. It was an old and rather close dining-room, with windows thrown wide to the green garden and a wonderful cascade of fading roses. Miss Seaton's great chair faced this window, so that its rose-reflected light shone full on her yellowish face, and on just such chocolate eyes as my

schoolfellow's, except that hers were more than half-covered by unusually long and heavy lids.

There she sat, steadily eating, with those sluggish eyes fixed for the most part on my face; above them stood the deep-lined fork between her eyebrows; and above that the wide expanse of a remarkable brow beneath its strange steep bank of hair. The lunch was copious, and consisted, I remember, of all such dishes as are generally considered too rich and too good for the schoolboy digestion—lobster mayonnaise, cold game sausages, an immense veal and ham pie farced with eggs, truffles, and numberless delicious flavours; besides kickshaws, creams, and sweetmeats. We even had wine, a half-glass of old darkish sherry each.

Miss Seaton enjoyed and indulged an enormous appetite. Her example and a natural schoolboy voracity soon overcame my nervousness of her, even to the extent of allowing me to enjoy to the best of my bent so rare a spread. Seaton was singularly modest; the greater part of his meal consisted of almonds and raisins, which he nibbled surreptitiously and as if he found difficulty in swallowing them.

I don't mean that Miss Seaton "conversed" with me. She merely scattered trenchant remarks and now and then twinkled a baited question over my head. But her face was like a dense and involved accompaniment to her talk. She presently dropped the "Mr.," to my intense relief, and called me now Withers, or Wither, now Smithers, and even once towards the close of the meal distinctly Johnson, though how on earth my name suggested it, or whose face mine had reanimated in memory, I cannot conceive.

"And is Arthur a good boy at school, Mr. Wither?" was one of her many questions. "Does he please his masters? Is he first in his class? What does the reverend Dr. Gummidge think of him, eh?"

I knew she was jeering at him, but her face was adamant against the least flicker of sarcasm or facetiousness. I gazed fixedly at a blushing crescent of lobster.

"I think you're eighth, aren't you, Seaton?"

Seaton moved his small pupils towards his aunt. But she continued to gaze with a kind of concentrated detachment at me.

"Arthur will never make a brilliant scholar, I fear," she said, lifting a dextrously-burdened fork to her wide mouth. . . .

After luncheon she proceeded me up to my bedroom. It was a jolly little bedroom, with a brass fender and rugs and a polished floor, on which it was possible, I afterwards found, to play "snowshoes." Over the washstand was a little black-framed water-colour drawing, depicting a large eye with an extremely fishlike intensity in the spark of light on the dark pupil; and in "illuminated" lettering beneath was printed very minutely, "Thou God, Seest ME," followed by a long looped monogram, "S.S.," in the corner. The other pictures were all of the sea: brigs on blue water; a schooner overtopping chalk cliffs; a rocky island of prodigious steepness, with two tiny sailors dragging a monstrous boat up a shelf of beach.

"This is the room, Withers, my brother William died in when a boy. Admire the view!"

I looked out of the window across the tree-tops. It was a day hot with sunshine over the green fields, and the cattle were standing swishing their tails in the shallow water. But the view at the moment was only exaggeratedly vivid because I was horribly dreading that she would presently enquire after my luggage, and I had not brought even a toothbrush. I need have had no fear. Hers was not that highly-civilised type of mind that is stuffed with sharp, material details. Nor could her ample presence be described as in the least motherly.

"I would never consent to question a schoolfellow behind my nephew's back," she said, standing in the middle of the room, "but tell me, Smithers, why is Arthur so unpopular? You, I understand, are his only close friend." She stood in a dazzle of sun, and out of it her eyes regarded me with such leaden penetration beneath their thick lids that I doubt if my face concealed the least thought from her. "But there, there," she added very suavely, stooping her head a little, "don't trouble to answer me. I never extort an answer. Boys are queer fish. Brains might perhaps have suggested his washing his hands before luncheon; but—not my choice, Smithers. God forbid! And now, perhaps, you would like to go into the garden again. I cannot actually see from here, but I should not be surprised if Arthur is now skulking behind that hedge."

He was. I saw his head come out and take a rapid glance at the windows.

"Join him, Mr. Smithers; we shall meet again, I hope, at the tea-table. The afternoon I spend in retirement."

Whether or not, Seaton and I had not been long engaged with the aid of two green switches in riding round and round a lumbering old grey horse we found in the meadow, before a rather bunched-up figure appeared, walking along the field-path on the other side of the water, with a magenta parasol studiously lowered in our direction throughout our slow progress, as if that were the magnetic needle and we the fixed Pole. Seaton at once lost all nerve in his riding. At the next lurch of the old mare's heels he toppled over in the grass, and I slid off the sleek broad back to join him where he stood, rubbing his shoulder and sourly watching the rather pompous figure till it was out of sight.

"Was that your aunt, Seaton?" I enquired; but not till then.

He nodded.

"Why didn't she take any notice of us, then?"

"She never does."

"Why not?"

"Oh, she knows all right, without; that's the dam awful part of it." Seaton was about the only fellow at Gummidge's who ever had the ostentation to use bad language. He had suffered for it too. But it wasn't, I think, bravado. I believe he really felt certain things more intensely than most of the other fellows, and they were generally things that fortunate and average people do not feel at all—the peculiar quality, for instance, of the British schoolboy's imagination.

"I tell you, Withers," he went on moodily, slinking across the meadow with

his hands covered up in his pockets, "she sees everything. And what she doesn't see she knows without."

"But how?" I said, not because I was much interested, but because the afternoon was so hot and tiresome and purposeless, and it seemed more of a bore to remain silent. Seaton turned gloomily and spoke in a very low voice.

"Don't appear to be talking of her, if you wouldn't mind. It's—because she's in league with the devil." He nodded his head and stooped to pick up a round flat pebble. "I tell you," he said, still stooping, "you fellows don't realise what it is. I know I'm a bit close and all that. But so would you be if you had that old hag listening to every thought you think."

I looked at him, then turned and surveyed one by one the windows of the house.

"Where's your *pater*?" I said awkwardly.

"Dead, ages and ages ago, and my mother too. She's not my aunt by right."

"What is she, then?"

"I mean she's not my mother's sister, because my grandmother married twice; and she's one of the first lot. I don't know what you call her, anyhow she's not my real aunt."

"She gives you plenty of pocket-money."

Seaton looked steadfastly at me out of his flat eyes. "She can't give me what's mine. When I come of age half the whole lot will be mine; and what's more" —he turned his back on the house—"I'll make her hand over every blessed shilling of it."

I put my hands in my pockets and stared at Seaton; "Is it much?"

He nodded.

"Who told you?" He got suddenly very angry; a darkish red came into his cheeks, his eyes glistened, but he made no answer, and we loitered listlessly about the garden until it was time for tea. . . .

Seaton's aunt was wearing an extraordinary kind of lace jacket when we sidled sheepishly into the drawing-room together. She greeted me with a heavy and protracted smile, and bade me bring a chair close to the little table.

"I hope Arthur has made you feel at home," she said, as she handed me my cup in her crooked hand. "He don't talk much to me; but then I'm an old woman. You must come again, Wither, and draw him out of his shell. You old snail!" She wagged her head at Seaton, who sat munching cake and watching her intently.

"And we must correspond, perhaps." She nearly shut her eyes at me. "You must write and tell me everything behind the creature's back." I confess I found her rather disquieting company. The evening drew on. Lamps were brought in by a man with a nondescript face and very quiet footsteps. Seaton was told to bring out the chess-men. And we played a game, she and I, with her big chin thrust over the board at every move as she gloated over the pieces and occasionally croaked "Check!"—after which she would sit back inscrutably staring at me. But the game was never finished. She simply hemmed me defence-

lessly in with a cloud of men that held me impotent, and yet one and all refused to administer to my poor flustered old king a merciful *coup de grâce*.

"There," she said as the clock struck ten—"a drawn game, Withers. We are very evenly matched. A very creditable defence, Withers. You know your room. There's supper on a tray in the dining-room. Don't let the creature over-eat himself. The gong will sound three-quarters of an hour *before* a punctual breakfast." She held out her cheek to Seaton, and he kissed it with obvious perfunctoriness. With me she shook hands.

"An excellent game," she said cordially, "but my memory is poor, and"—she swept the pieces helterskelter into the box—"the result will never be known." She raised her great head far back. "Eh?"

It was a kind of challenge, and I could only murmur: "Oh, I was absolutely in a hole, you know!" when she burst out laughing and waved us both out of the room.

Seaton and I stood and ate our supper, with one candlestick to light us, in a corner of the dining-room. "Well, and how would you like it?" he said very softly, after cautiously poking his head round the doorway.

"Like what?"

"Being spied on—every blessed thing you do and think?"

"I shouldn't like it at all," I said, "if she does."

"And yet you let her smash you up at chess!"

"I didn't let her!" I said, indignantly.

"Well, you funked it, then."

"And I didn't funk it either," I said; "she's so jolly clever with her knights." Seaton stared fixedly at the candle. "You wait, that's all," he said slowly. And we went upstairs to bed.

I had not been long in bed, I think, when I was cautiously awakened by a touch on my shoulder. And there was Seaton's face in the candlelight—and his eyes looking into mine.

"What's up?" I said, rising quickly to my elbow.

"Don't scurry," he whispered, "or she'll hear. I'm sorry for waking you, but I didn't think you'd be asleep so soon."

"Why, what's the time, then?" Seaton wore, what was then rather unusual, a night-suit, and he hauled his big silver watch out of the pocket in his jacket.

"It's a quarter to twelve. I never get to sleep before twelve—not here."

"What do you do, then?"

"Oh, I read and listen."

"Listen?"

Seaton stared into his candle-flame as if he were listening even then. "You can't guess what it is. All you read in ghost stories, that's all rot. You can't see much, Withers, but you know all the same."

"Know what?"

"Why, that they're there."

"Who's there?" I asked fretfully, glancing at the door.

"Why, in the house. It swarms with 'em. Just you stand still and listen outside

my bedroom door in the middle of the night. I have, dozens of times; they're all over the place."

"Look here, Seaton," I said, "you asked me to come here, and I didn't mind chucking up a leave just to oblige you, and because I'd promised; but don't get talking a lot of rot, that's all, or you'll know the difference when we get back."

"Don't fret," he said coldly, turning away. "I shan't be at school long. And what's more, you're here now, and there isn't anybody else to talk to. I'll chance the other."

"Look here, Seaton," I said, "you may think you're going to scare me with a lot of stuff about voices and all that. But I'll just thank you to clear out; and you may please yourself about pottering about all night."

He made no answer; he was standing by the dressing-table looking across his candle into the looking-glass; he turned and stared slowly round the walls.

"Even this room's nothing more than a coffin. I suppose she told you—'It's exactly the same as when my brother William died'—trust her for that! And good luck to him, say I. Look at that." He raised his candle close to the little water-colour I have mentioned. "There's hundreds of eyes like that in this house; and even if God does see you, He takes precious good care you don't see Him. And it's just the same with them. I tell you what, Withers, I'm getting sick of all this. I shan't stand it much longer."

The house was silent within and without, and even in the yellowish radiance of the candle a faint silver showed through the open window on my blind. I slipped off the bedclothes, wide awake, and sat irresolutely on the bedside.

"I know you're only guying me," I said angrily, "but why is the house full of —what you say? Why do you hear—what you *do* hear? Tell me that, you silly fool!"

Seaton sat down on a chair and rested his candlestick on his knee. He blinked at me calmly. "She brings them," he said, with lifted eyebrows.

"Who? Your aunt?"

He nodded.

"How?"

"I told you," he answered pettishly. "She's in league. You don't know. She as good as killed my mother; I know that. But it's not only her by a long chalk. She just sucks you dry. I know. And that's what she'll do for me; because I'm like her—like my mother, I mean. She simply hates to see me alive. I wouldn't be like that old she-wolf for a million pounds. And so"—he broke off, with a comprehensive wave of his candlestick—"they're always here. Ah, my boy, wait till she's dead! She'll hear something then, I can tell you. It's all very well now, but wait till then! I wouldn't be in her shoes when she has to clear out—for something. Don't you go and believe I care for ghosts, or whatever you like to call them. We're all in the same box. We're all under her thumb."

He was looking almost nonchalantly at the ceiling at the moment, when I saw his face change, saw his eyes suddenly drop like shot birds and fix themselves on the cranny of the door he had just left ajar. Even from where I sat I could see his colour change; he went greenish. He crouched without stirring, simply fixed.

And I, scarcely daring to breathe, sat with creeping skin, simply watching him. His hands relaxed, and he gave a kind of sigh.

"Was that one?" I whispered, with a timid show of jauntiness. He looked round, opened his mouth, and nodded. "What?" I said. He jerked his thumb with meaningful eyes, and I knew that he meant that his aunt had been there listening at our door cranny.

"Look here, Seaton," I said once more, wriggling to my feet. "You may think I'm a jolly noodle; just as you please. But your aunt has been civil to me and all that, and I don't believe a word you say about her, that's all, and never did. Every fellow's a bit off his pluck at night, and you may think it a fine sport to try your rubbish on me. I heard your aunt come upstairs before I fell asleep. And I'll bet you a level tanner she's in bed now. What's more, you can keep your blessed ghosts to yourself. It's a guilty conscience, I should think."

Seaton looked at me curiously, without answering for a moment. "I'm not a liar, Withers; but I'm not going to quarrel either. You're the only chap I care a button for; or, at any rate, you're the only chap that's ever come here; and it's something to tell a fellow what you feel. I don't care a fig for fifty thousand ghosts, although I swear on my solemn oath that I know they're here. But she"—he turned deliberately—"you laid a tanner she's in bed, Withers; well, I know different. She's never in bed much of the night, and I'll prove it, too, just to show you I'm not such a nolly as you think I am. Come on!"

"Come on where?"

"Why, to see."

I hesitated. He opened a large cupboard and took out a small dark dressing-gown and a kind of shawl-jacket. He threw the jacket on the bed and put on the gown. His dusky face was colourless, and I could see by the way he fumbled at the sleeves he was shivering. But it was no good showing the white feather now. So I threw the tasselled shawl over my shoulders and, leaving our candle brightly burning on the chair, we went out together and stood in the corridor.

"Now then, listen!" Seaton whispered.

We stood leaning over the staircase. It was like leaning over a well, so still and chill the air was all around us. But presently, as I suppose happens in most old houses, began to echo and answer in my ears a medley of infinite small stirrings and whisperings. Now out of the distance an old timber would relax its fibres, or a scurry die away behind the perishing wainscoat. But amid and behind such sounds as these I seemed to begin to be conscious, as it were, of the lightest of footfalls, sounds as faint as the vanishing remembrance of voices in a dream. Seaton was all in obscurity except his face; out of that his eyes gleamed darkly, watching me. "You'd hear, too, in time, my fine soldier," he muttered. "Come on!"

He descended the stairs, slipping his lean fingers lightly along the balusters. He turned to the right at the loop, and I followed him barefooted along a thickly-carpeted corridor. At the end stood a door ajar. And from here we very stealthily and in complete blackness ascended five narrow stairs. Seaton, with immense caution, slowly pushed open a door, and we stood together looking into a great

pool of duskiness, out of which, lit by the feeble clearness of a night-light, rose a vast bed. A heap of clothes lay on the floor; beside them two slippers dozed, with noses each to each, two yards apart. Somewhere a little clock ticked huskily. There was a rather close smell of lavender and *eau de cologne*, mingled with the fragrance of ancient sachets, soap, and drugs. Yet it was a scent even more peculiarly commingled than that.

And the bed! I stared warily in; it was mounded gigantically, and it was empty.

Seaton turned a vague pale face, all shadows: "What did I say?" he muttered. "Who's—who's the fool now, I say? How are we going to get back without meeting her, I say? Answer me that! Oh, I wish to goodness you hadn't come here, Withers."

He stood visibly shivering in his skimpy gown, and could hardly speak for his teeth chattering. And very distinctly, in the hush that followed his whisper, I heard approaching a faint unhurried voluminous rustle. Seaton clutched my arm, dragged me to the right across the room to a large cupboard, and drew the door close to on us. And presently, as with bursting lungs I peeped out into the long, low, curtained bedroom, waddled in that wonderful great head and body. I can see her now, all patched and lined with shadow, her tied-up hair (she must have had enormous quantities of it for so old a woman), her heavy lids above those flat, slow, vigilant eyes. She just passed across my ken in the vague dusk; but the bed was out of sight.

We waited on and on, listening to the clock's muffled ticking. Not the ghost of a sound rose up from the great bed. Either she lay archly listening or slept a sleep serener than an infant's. And when, it seemed, we had been hours in hiding and were cramped, chilled, and half suffocated, we crept out on all fours, with terror knocking at our ribs, and so down the five narrow stairs and back to the little candle-lit blue-and-gold bedroom.

Once there, Seaton gave in. He sat livid on a chair with closed eyes.

"Here," I said shaking his arm, "I'm going to bed; I've had enough of this foolery; I'm going to bed." His lips quivered, but he made no answer. I poured out some water into my basin and, with that cold pictured azure eye fixed on us, bespattered Seaton's sallow face and forehead and dabbled his hair. He presently sighed and opened fish-like eyes.

"Come on!" I said. "Don't get shamming, there's a good chap. Get on my back if you like, and I'll carry you into your bedroom."

He waved me away and stood up. So, with my candle in one hand, I took him under the arm and walked him along according to his direction down the corridor. His was a much dingier room than mine, and littered with boxes, paper, cages, and clothes. I huddled him into bed and turned to go. And suddenly—I can hardly explain it now—a kind of cold and deadly terror swept over me. I almost ran out of the room, with eyes fixed rigidly in front of me, blew out my candle, and buried my head under the bedclothes.

When I awoke, roused not by a gong, but by a long-continued tapping at my door, sunlight was raying in on cornice and bedpost, and birds were singing in the garden. I got up, ashamed of the night's folly, dressed quickly, and went

downstairs. The breakfast-room was sweet with flowers and fruit and honey. Seaton's aunt was standing in the garden beside the open French windows, feeding a great flutter of birds. I watched her for a moment, unseen. Her face was set in a deep reverie beneath the shadow of a big loose sun-hat. It was deeply lined, crooked, and, in a way I can't describe, fixedly vacant and strange. I coughed, and she turned at once with a prodigious smile to enquire how I had slept. And in that mysterious way by which we learn each other's secret thoughts without a sentence spoken I knew that she had followed every word and movement of the night before, and was triumphing over my affected innocence and ridiculing my friendly and too easy advances.

We returned to school, Seaton and I, lavishly laden, and by rail all the way. I made no reference to the obscure talk we had had, and resolutely refused to meet his eyes or to take up the hints he let fall. I was relieved—and yet I was sorry—to be going back, and strode on as fast as I could from the station, with Seaton almost trotting at my heels. But he insisted on buying more fruit and sweets—my share of which I accepted with a very bad grace. It was uncomfortably like a bribe; and, after all, I had no quarrel with his rum old aunt, and hadn't really believed half the stuff he had told me.

I saw as little of him as I could after that. He never referred to our visit or resumed his confidences, though in class I would sometimes catch his eyes fixed on mine, full of a mute understanding, which I easily affected not to understand. He left Gummidge's, as I have said, rather abruptly, though I never heard of anything to his discredit. And I did not see him or have any news of him again till by chance we met one summer afternoon in the Strand.

He was dressed rather oddly in a coat too large for him and a bright silky tie. But we instantly recognised one another under the awning of a cheap jeweller's shop. He immediately attached himself to me and dragged me off, not too cheerfully, to lunch with him at an Italian restaurant near by. He chattered about our old school, which he remembered only with dislike and disgust; told me coldbloodedly of the disastrous fate of one or two of the old fellows who had been among his chief tormentors; insisted on an expensive wine and the whole gamut of the foreign menu; and finally informed me, with a good deal of niggling, that he had come up to town to buy an engagement-ring.

And of course: "How is your aunt?" I enquired at last.

He seemed to have been awaiting the question. It fell like a stone into a deep pool, so many expressions flitted across his long un-English face.

"She's aged a good deal," he said softly, and broke off.

"She's been very decent," he continued presently after, and paused again. "In a way." He eyed me fleetingly. "I dare say you heard that—she—that is, that we—had lost a good deal of money."

"No," I said.

"Oh, yes!" said Seaton, and paused again.

And somehow, poor fellow, I knew in the clink and clatter of glass and voices that he had lied to me; that he did not possess, and never had possessed, a penny

beyond what his aunt had squandered on his too ample allowance of pocket-money.

"And the ghosts?" I enquired quizzically.

He grew instantly solemn, and, though it may have been my fancy, slightly yellowed. But "You are making game of me, Withers," was all he said.

He asked for my address, and I rather reluctantly gave him my card.

"Look here, Withers," he said, as we stood together in the sunlight on the kerb, saying good-bye, "here I am, and—and it's all very well. I'm not perhaps as fanciful as I was. But you are practically the only friend I have on earth—except Alice. . . . And there—to make a clean breast of it, I'm not sure that my aunt cares much about my getting married. She doesn't say so, of course. You know her well enough for that." He looked sidelong at the rattling gaudy traffic.

"What I was going to say is this: Would you mind coming down? You needn't stay the night unless you please, though, of course, you know you would be awfully welcome. But I should like you to meet my—to meet Alice; and then, perhaps, you might tell me your honest opinion of—of the other too."

I vaguely demurred. He pressed me. And we parted with a half promise that I would come. He waved his ball-topped cane at me and ran off in his long jacket after a 'bus.

A letter arrived soon after, in his small weak handwriting, giving me full particulars regarding route and trains. And without the least curiosity, even, perhaps, with some little annoyance that chance should have thrown us together again, I accepted his invitation and arrived one hazy midday at his out-of-the-way station to find him sitting on a low seat under a clump of double hollyhocks, awaiting me.

His face looked absent and singularly listless; but he seemed, none the less, pleased to see me.

We walked up the village street, past the little dingy apothecary's and the empty forge, and, as on my first visit, skirted the house together, and, instead of entering by the front door, made our way down the green path into the garden at the back. A pale haze of cloud muffled the sun; the garden lay in a grey shimmer—its old trees, its snap-dragoned faintly glittering walls. But now there was an air of slovenliness where before all had been neat and methodical. In a patch of shallowly-dug soil stood a worn-down spade leaning against a tree. There was an old broken wheelbarrow. The roses had run to leaf and briar; the fruit-trees were unpruned. The goddess of neglect brooded in secret.

"You ain't much of a gardener, Seaton," I said, with a sigh of ease.

"I think, do you know, I like it best like this," said Seaton. "We haven't any man now, of course. Can't afford it." He stood staring at his little dark square of freshly-turned earth. "And it always seems to me," he went on ruminatingly, "that, after all we are nothing better than interlopers on the earth, disfiguring and staining wherever we go. I know it's shocking blasphemy to say so, but then it's different here, you see. We are further away."

"To tell you the truth, Seaton, I *don't* quite see," I said; "but it isn't a new philosophy, is it? Anyhow, it's a precious beastly one."

"It's only what I think," he replied, with all his odd old stubborn meekness.

We wandered on together, talking little, and still with that expression of uneasy vigilance on Seaton's face. He pulled out his watch as we stood gazing idly over the green meadows and the dark motionless bulrushes.

"I think, perhaps, it's nearly time for lunch," he said. "Would you like to come in?"

We turned and walked slowly towards the house, across whose windows I confess my own eyes, too, went restlessly wandering in search of its rather disconcerting inmate. There was a pathetic look of draggledness, of want of means and care, rust and overgrowth and faded paint. Seaton's aunt, a little to my relief, did not share our meal. Seaton carved the cold meat, and dispatched a heaped-up plate by an elderly servant for his aunt's private consumption. We talked little and in half-suppressed tones, and sipped a bottle of Madeira which Seaton had rather heedfully fetched out of the great mahogany sideboard.

I played him a dull and effortless game of chess, yawning between the moves he himself made almost at haphazard, and with attention elsewhere engaged. About five o'clock came the sound of a distant ring, and Seaton jumped up, overturning the board, and so ending a game that else might have fatuously continued to this day. He effusively excused himself, and after some little while returned with a slim, dark, rather sallow girl of about nineteen, in a white gown and hat, to whom I was presented with some little nervousness as his "dear old friend and schoolfellow."

We talked on in the pale afternoon light, still, as it seemed to me, and even in spite of a real effort to be clear and gay, in a half-suppressed, lack-lustre fashion. We all seemed, if it were not my fancy, to me expectant, to be rather anxiously awaiting an arrival, the appearance of someone who all but filled our collective consciousness. Seaton talked least of all, and in a restless interjectory way, as he continually fidgeted from chair to chair. At last he proposed a stroll in the garden before the sun should have quite gone down.

Alice walked between us. Her hair and eyes were conspicuously dark against the whiteness of her gown. She carried herself not ungracefully, and yet without the least movement of her arms and body, and answered us both without turning her head. There was a curious provocative reserve in that impassive and rather long face, a half-unconscious strength of character.

And yet somehow I knew—I believe we all knew—that this walk, this discussion of their future plans was a futility. I had nothing to base such a cynicism on, except only a vague sense of oppression, the foreboding remembrance of the inert invincible power in the background, to whom optimistic plans and love-making and youth are as chaff and thistle-down. We came back silent, in the last light. Seaton's aunt was there—under an old brass lamp. Her hair was as barbarously massed and curled as ever. Her eyelids, I think, hung even a little heavier in age over their slow-moving inscrutable pupils. We filed in softly out of the evening, and I made my bow.

"In this short interval, Mr. Withers," she remarked amiably, "you have put off youth, put on the man. Dear me, how sad it is to see the young days vanish-

ing! Sit down. My nephew tells me you met by chance—or act of Providence, shall we call it?—and in my beloved Strand! You, I understand, are to be best man—yes, best man, or am I divulging secrets?" She surveyed Arthur and Alice with overwhelming graciousness. They sat apart on two low chairs and smiled in return.

"And Arthur—how do you think Arthur is looking?"

"I think he looks very much in need of a change," I said deliberately.

"A change! Indeed?" She all but shut her eyes at me and with an exaggerated sentimentality shook her head. "My dear Mr. Withers! Are we not *all* in need of a change in this fleeting, fleeting world?" She mused over the remark like a connoisseur. "And you," she continued, turning abruptly to Alice, "I hope you pointed out to Mr. Withers all my pretty bits?"

"We walked round the garden," said Alice, looking out of the window. "It's a very beautiful evening."

"*Is* it?" said the old lady, starting up violently. "Then on this very beautiful evening we will go in to supper. Mr. Withers, your arm; Arthur, bring your bride."

I can scarcely describe with what curious ruminations I led the way into the faded, heavy-aired dining-room, with this indefinable old creature leaning weightily on my arm—the large flat bracelet on the yellow-laced wrist. She fumed a little, breathed rather heavily, as if with an effort of mind rather than of body; for she had grown much stouter and yet little more proportionate. And to talk into that great white face, so close to mine, was a queer experience in the dim light of the corridor, and even in the twinkling crystal of the candles. She was naïve—appallingly naïve; she was sudden and superficial; she was even arch; and all these in the brief, rather puffy passage from one room to the other, with these two tongue-tied children bringing up the rear. The meal was tremendous. I have never seen such a monstrous salad. But the dishes were greasy and over-spiced, and were indifferently cooked. One thing only was quite unchanged—my hostess's appetite was as Gargantuan as ever. The old solid candelabra that lighted us stood before her high-back chair. Seaton sat a little removed, with his plate almost in darkness.

And throughout this prodigious meal his aunt talked, mainly to me, mainly at Seaton, with an occasional satirical courtesy to Alice and muttered explosions of directions to the servant. She had aged, and yet, if it be not nonsense to say so, seemed no older. I suppose to the Pyramids a decade is but as the rustling down of a handful of dust. And she reminded me of some such unshakable prehistoricism. She certainly was an amazing talker—racy, extravagant, with a delivery that was perfectly overwhelming. As for Seaton—her flashes of silence were for him. On her enormous volubility would suddenly fall a hush: acid sarcasm would be left implied; and she would sit softly moving her great head, with eyes fixed full in a dreamy smile; but with her whole attention, one could see, slowly, joyously absorbing his mute discomfiture.

She confided in us her views on a theme vaguely occupying at the moment, I suppose, all our minds. "We have barbarous institutions, and so must put up,

I suppose, with a never-ending procession of fools—of fools *ad infinitum*. Marriage, Mr. Withers, was instituted in the privacy of a garden; *sub rosa*, as it were. Civilization flaunts it in the glare of day. The dull marry the poor; the rich the effete; and so our New Jerusalem is peopled with naturals, plain and coloured, at either end. I detest folly; I detest still more (if I must be frank, dear Arthur), mere cleverness. Mankind has simply become a tailless host of uninstinctive animals. We should never have taken to Evolution, Mr. Withers. 'Natural Selection!'—little gods and fishes!—the deaf for the dumb. We should have used our brains—intellectual pride, the ecclesiastics call it. And by brains I mean—what do I mean, Alice?—I mean, my dear child"—and she laid two gross fingers on Alice's narrow sleeve—"I mean courage. Consider it, Arthur. I read that the scientific world is once more beginning to be afraid of spiritual agencies. Spiritual agencies that tap, and actually float, bless their hearts! I think just one more of those mulberries—thank you.

"They talk about 'blind Love,' " she ran inconsequently on as she helped herself, with eyes roving on the dish, "but why blind? I think, do you know, from weeping over its rickets. After all, it is we plain women that triumph, Mr. Withers, beyond the mockery of time. Alice, now! Fleeting, fleeting is youth, my child. What's that you were confiding to your plate, Arthur? Satirical boy. He laughs at his old aunt: nay, but thou didst laugh. He detests all sentiment. He whispers the most acid asides. Come, my love, we will leave these cynics; we will go and commiserate with each other on our sex. The choice of two evils, Mr. Smithers!" I opened the door, and she swept out as if borne on a torrent of unintelligible indignation; and Arthur and I were left in the clear four-flamed light alone.

For a while we sat in silence. He shook his head at my cigarette-case, and I lit a cigarette. Presently he fidgeted in his chair and poked his head forward into the light. He paused to rise and shut again the shut door.

"How long will you be?" he said, standing by the table.

I laughed.

"Oh, it's not that!" he said, in some confusion. "Of course, I like to be with her. But it's not that. The truth is, Withers, I don't care about leaving her too long with my aunt."

I hesitated. He looked at me questioningly.

"Look here, Seaton," I said, "you know well enough that I don't want to interfere in your affairs, or to offer advice where it is not wanted. But don't you think perhaps you may not treat your aunt quite in the right way? As one gets old, you know, a little give and take. I have an old godmother, or something. She talks, too. . . . A little allowance: it does no harm. But hang it all, I'm no talker."

He sat down with his hands in his pockets and still with his eyes fixed almost incredulously on mine. "How?" he said.

"Well, my dear fellow, if I'm any judge—mind, I don't say that I am—but I can't help thinking she thinks you don't care for her; and perhaps takes your silence for—for bad temper. She has been very decent to you, hasn't she?"

"'Decent?' My God!" said Seaton.

I smoked on in silence; but he continued to look at me with that peculiar concentration I remembered of old.

"I don't think, perhaps, Withers," he began presently, "I don't think you quite understand. Perhaps you are not quite our kind. You always did, just like the other fellows, guy me at school. You laughed at me that night you came to stay here—about the voices and all that. But I don't mind being laughed at—because I know."

"Know what?" It was the same old system of dull question and evasive answer.

"I mean I know that what we see and hear is only the smallest fraction of what is. I know she lives quite out of this. She *talks* to you; but it's all make-believe. It's all a 'parlour game.' She's not really with you; only pitting her outside wits against yours and enjoying the fooling. She's living on inside on what you're rotten without. That's what it is—a cannibal feast. She's a spider. It doesn't much matter what you call it. It means the same kind of thing. I tell you, Withers, she hates me; and you can scarcely dream what that hatred means. I used to think I had an inkling of the reason. It's oceans deeper than that. It just lies behind: herself against myself. Why, after all, how much do we really understand of anything? We don't even know our own histories, and not a tenth, not a tenth of the reasons. What has life been to me?—nothing but a trap. And when one is set free, it only begins again. I thought you might understand; but you are on a different level: that's all."

"What on earth are you talking about?" I said contemptuously, in spite of myself.

"I mean what I say," he said gutturally. "All this outside's only make-believe—but there! what's the good of talking? So far as this is concerned I'm as good as done. You wait."

Seaton blew out three of the candles, and, leaving the vacant room in semi-darkness, we groped our way along the corridor to the drawing-room. There a full moon stood shining in at the long garden windows. Alice sat stooping at the door, with her hands clasped, looking out, alone.

"Where is she?" Seaton asked in a low tone.

Alice looked up; their eyes met in a kind of instantaneous understanding, and the door immediately afterwards opened behind us.

"*Such* a moon!" said a voice that, once heard, remained unforgettably on the ear. "A night for lovers, Mr. Withers, if ever there was one. Get a shawl, my dear Arthur, and take Alice for a little promenade. I dare say we old cronies will manage to keep awake. Hasten, hasten, Romeo! My poor, poor Alice, how laggard a lover!"

Seaton returned with a shawl. They drifted out into the moonlight. My companion gazed after them till they were out of hearing, turned to me gravely, and suddenly twisted her white face into such a convulsion of contemptuous amusement that I could only stare blankly in reply.

"Dear innocent children!" she said, with inimitable unctuousness. "Well,

well, Mr. Withers, we poor seasoned old creatures must move with the times. Do you sing?"

I scouted the idea.

"Then you must listen to my playing. Chess"—she clasped her forehead with both cramped hands—"chess is now completely beyond my poor wits."

She sat down at the piano and ran her fingers in a flourish over the keys. "What shall it be? How shall we capture them, those passionate hearts? That first fine careless rapture? Poetry itself." She gazed softly into the garden a moment, and presently, with a shake of her body, began to play the opening bars of Beethoven's "Moonlight Sonata." The piano was old and woolly. She played without music. The lamplight was rather dim. The moonbeams from the window lay across the keys. Her head was in shadow. And whether it was simply due to her personality or to some really occult skill in her playing I cannot say: I only know that she gravely and deliberately set herself to satirise the beautiful music. It brooded on the air, disillusioned, charged with mockery and bitterness. I stood at the window; far down the path I could see the white figure glimmering in that pool of colourless light. A few faint stars shone, and still that amazing woman behind me dragged out of the unwilling keys her wonderful grotesquerie of youth, and love, and beauty. It came to an end. I knew the player was watching me. "Please, please, go on!" I murmured, without turning. "Please go on playing, Miss Seaton."

No answer was returned to my rather fluttering sarcasm, but I knew in some indefinite way that I was being acutely scrutinised, when suddenly there followed a procession of quiet, plaintive chords which broke at last softly into the hymn, "A Few More Years Shall Roll."

I confess it held me spellbound. There is a wistful, strained, plangent pathos in the tune; but beneath those masterly old hands it cried softly and bitterly the solitude and desperate estrangement of the world. Arthur and his lady-love vanished from my thoughts. No one could put into a rather hackneyed old hymn-tune such an appeal who had never known the meaning of the words. Their meaning, anyhow, isn't commonplace.

I turned very cautiously and glanced at the musician. She was leaning forward a little over the keys, so that at the approach of my cautious glance she had but to turn her face into the thin flood of moonlight for every feature to become distinctly visible. And so, with the tune abruptly terminated, we steadfastly regarded one another, and she broke into a chuckle of laughter.

"Not quite so seasoned as I supposed, Mr. Withers. I see you are a real lover of music. To me it is too painful. It evokes too much thought. . . ."

I could scarcely see her little glittering eyes under their penthouse lids.

"And now," she broke off crisply, "tell me, as a man of the world, what do you think of my new niece?"

I was not a man of the world, nor was I much flattered in my stiff and dullish way of looking at things by being called one; and I could answer her without the least hesitation.

"I don't think, Miss Seaton, I'm much of a judge of character. She's very charming."

"A brunette?"

"I think I prefer dark women."

"And why? Consider, Mr. Withers; dark hair, dark eyes, dark cloud, dark night, dark vision, dark death, dark grave, dark DARK!"

Perhaps the climax would have rather thrilled Seaton, but I was too thick-skinned. "I don't know much about all that," I answered rather pompously. "Broad daylight's difficult enough for most of us."

"Ah," she said, with a sly inward burst of satirical laughter.

"And I suppose," I went on, perhaps a little nettled, "it isn't the actual darkness one admires, it's the contrast of the skin, and the colour of the eyes, and —and their shining. Just as," I went blundering on, too late to turn back, "just as you only see the stars in the dark. It would be a long day without any evening. As for death and the grave, I don't suppose we shall much notice that." Arthur and his sweetheart were slowly returning along the dewy path. "I believe in making the best of things."

"How very interesting!" came the smooth answer. "I see you are a philosopher, Mr. Withers. H'm! 'As for death and the grave, I don't suppose we shall much notice that.' Very interesting. . . . And I'm sure," she added in a particularly suave voice, "I profoundly hope so." She rose slowly from her stool. "You will take pity on me again, I hope. You and I would get on famously—kindred spirits —elective affinities. And, of course, now that my nephew's going to leave us, now that his affections are centred on another, I shall be a very lonely old woman. . . . Shall I not, Arthur?"

Seaton blinked stupidly. "I didn't hear what you said, aunt."

"I was telling our old friend, Arthur, that when you are gone I shall be a very lonely old woman."

"Oh, I don't think so," he said in a strange voice.

"He means, Mr. Withers, he means, my dear child," she said, sweeping her eyes over Alice, "he means that I shall have memory for company—heavenly memory—the ghosts of other days. Sentimental boy! And did you enjoy our music, Alice? Did I really stir that youthful heart? . . . O, O, O," continued the horrible old creature, "you billers and cooers, I have been listening to such flatteries, such confessions! Beware, beware, Arthur, there's many a slip." She rolled her little eyes at me, she shrugged her shoulders at Alice, and gazed an instant stonily into her nephew's face.

I held out my hand. "Good night, good night!" she cried. "He that fights and runs away. Ah, good night, Mr. Withers; come again soon!" She thrust out her cheek at Alice, and we all three filed slowly out of the room.

Black shadow darkened the porch and half the spreading sycamore. We walked without speaking up the dusty village street. Here and there a crimson window glowed. At the fork of the highroad I said good-bye. But I had taken hardly more than a dozen paces when a sudden impulse seized me.

"Seaton!" I called.

He turned in the moonlight.

"You have my address; if by any chance, you know, you should care to spend a week or two in town between this and the—the Day, we should be delighted to see you."

"Thank you, Withers, thank you," he said in a low voice.

"I dare say"—I waved my stick gallantly to Alice—"I dare say you will be doing some shopping; we could all meet," I added laughing.

"Thank you, thank you, Withers—immensely," he repeated.

And so we parted.

But they were out of the jog-trot of my prosaic life. And being of a stolid and incurious nature, I left Seaton and his marriage, and even his aunt, to themselves in my memory, and scarcely gave a thought to them until one day I was walking up the Strand again, and passed the flashing gloaming of the covered-in jeweller's shop where I had accidentally encountered my old schoolfellow in the summer. It was one of those still close autumnal days after a rainy night. I cannot say why, but a vivid recollection returned to my mind of our meeting and of how suppressed Seaton had seemed, and of how vainly he had endeavoured to appear assured and eager. He must be married by now, and had doubtless returned from his honeymoon. And I had clean forgotten my manners, had sent not a word of congratulation, nor—as I might very well have done, and as I knew he would have been immensely pleased at my doing—the ghost of a wedding-present.

On the other hand, I pleaded with myself, I had had no invitation. I paused at the corner of Trafalgar Square, and at the bidding of one of those caprices that seize occasionally on even an unimaginative mind, I suddenly ran after a green 'bus that was passing, and found myself bound on a visit I had not in the least foreseen.

The colours of autumn were over the village when I arrived. A beautiful late afternoon sunlight bathed thatch and meadow. But it was close and hot. A child, two dogs, a very old woman with a heavy basket I encountered. One or two incurious tradesmen looked idly up as I passed by. It was all so rural and so still, my whimsical impulse had so much flagged, that for a while I hesitated to venture under the shadow of the sycamore-tree to enquire after the happy pair. I deliberately passed by the faint-blue gates and continued my walk under the high green and tufted wall. Hollyhocks had attained their topmost bud and seeded in the little cottage gardens beyond; the Michaelmas daisies were in flower; a sweet warm aromatic smell of fading leaves was in the air. Beyond the cottages lay a field where cattle were grazing, and beyond that I came to a little churchyard. Then the road wound on, pathless and houseless, among gorse and bracken. I turned impatiently and walked quickly back to the house and rang the bell.

The rather colourless elderly woman who answered my enquiry informed me that Miss Seaton was at home, as if only taciturnity forbade her adding, "But she doesn't want to see *you*."

"Might I, do you think, have Mr. Arthur's address?" I said.

She looked at me with quiet astonishment, as if waiting for an explanation. Not the faintest of smiles came into her thin face.

"I will tell Miss Seaton," she said after a pause. "Please walk in."

She showed me into the dingy undusted drawing-room, filled with evening sunshine and with the green-dyed light that penetrated the leaves overhanging the long French windows. I sat down and waited on and on, occasionally aware of a creaking footfall overhead. At last the door opened a little, and the great face I had once known peered round at me. For it was enormously changed; mainly, I think, because the old eyes had rather suddenly failed, and so a kind of stillness and darkness lay over its calm and wrinkled pallor.

"Who is it?" she asked.

I explained myself and told her the occasion of my visit.

She came in and shut the door carefully after her and, though the fumbling was scarcely perceptible, groped her way to a chair. She had on an old dressing-gown, like a cassock, of a patterned cinnamon colour.

"What is it you want?" she said, seating herself and lifting her blank face to mine.

"Might I just have Arthur's address?" I said deferentially. "I am so sorry to have disturbed you."

"H'm. You have come to see my nephew?"

"Not necessarily to see him, only to hear how he is, and, of course, Mrs. Seaton, too. I am afraid my silence must have appeared . . ."

"He hasn't noticed your silence," croaked the old voice out of the great mask; "besides, there isn't any Mrs. Seaton."

"Ah, then," I answered, after a momentary pause, "I have not seemed so black as I painted myself! And how is Miss Outram?"

"She's gone into Yorkshire," answered Seaton's aunt.

"And Arthur too?"

She did not reply, but simply sat blinking at me with lifted chin, as if listening, but certainly not for what I might have to say. I began to feel rather at a loss.

"You were no close friend of my nephew's, Mr. Smithers?" she said presently.

"No," I answered, welcoming the cue, "and yet, do you know, Miss Seaton, he is one of the very few of my old schoolfellows I have come across in the last few years, and I suppose as one gets older one begins to value old associations . . ." My voice seemed to trail off into a vacuum. "I thought Miss Outram," I hastily began again, "a particularly charming girl. I hope they are both quite well."

Still the old face solemnly blinked at me in silence.

"You must find it very lonely, Miss Seaton, with Arthur away?"

"I was never lonely in my life," she said sourly. "I don't look to flesh and blood for my company. When you've got to be my age, Mr. Smithers (which God forbid), you'll find life a very different affair from what you seem to think it is now. You won't seek company then, I'll be bound. It's thrust on you." Her face edged round into the clear green light, and her eyes groped, as it were,

over my vacant, disconcerted face. "I dare say, now," she said, composing her mouth, "I dare say my nephew told you a good many tarradiddles in his time. Oh, yes, a good many, eh? He was always a liar. What, now, did he say of me? Tell me, now." She leant forward as far as she could, trembling, with an ingratiating smile.

"I think he is rather superstitious," I said coldly, "but, honestly, I have a very poor memory, Miss Seaton."

"Why?" she said. "*I* haven't."

"The engagement hasn't been broken off, I hope."

"Well, between you and me," she said, shrinking up and with an immensely confidential grimace, "it has."

"I'm sure I'm very sorry to hear it. And where is Arthur?"

"Eh?"

"Where is Arthur?"

We faced each other mutely among the dead old bygone furniture. Past all my scrutiny was that large, flat, grey, cryptic countenance. And then, suddenly, our eyes for the first time really met. In some indescribable way out of that thick-lidded obscurity a far small something stooped and looked out at me for a mere instant of time that seemed of almost intolerable protraction. Involuntarily I blinked and shook my head. She muttered something with great rapidity, but quite inarticulately; rose and hobbled to the door. I thought I heard, mingled in broken mutterings, something about tea.

"Please, please, don't trouble," I began, but could say no more, for the door was already shut between us. I stood and looked out on the long-neglected garden. I could just see the bright greenness of Seaton's old tadpole pond. I wandered about the room. Dusk began to gather, the last birds in that dense shadowiness of trees had ceased to sing. And not a sound was to be heard in the house. I waited on and on, vainly speculating. I even attempted to ring the bell; but the wire was broken, and only jangled loosely at my efforts.

I hesitated, unwilling to call or to venture out, and yet more unwilling to linger on, waiting for a tea that promised to be an exceedingly comfortless supper. And as darkness drew down, a feeling of the utmost unease and disquietude came over me. All my talks with Seaton returned on me with a suddenly enriched meaning. I recalled again his face as we had stood hanging over the staircase, listening in the small hours to the inexplicable stirrings of the night. There were no candles in the room; every minute the autumnal darkness deepened. I cautiously opened the door and listened, and with some little dismay withdrew, for I was uncertain of my way out. I even tried the garden, but was confronted under a veritable thicket of foliage by a padlocked gate. It would be a little too ignominious to be caught scaling a friend's garden fence!

Cautiously returning into the still and musty drawing-room, I took out my watch, and gave the incredible old woman ten minutes in which to reappear. And when that tedious ten minutes had ticked by I could scarcely distinguish its hands. I determined to wait no longer, drew open the door, and, trusting to my

sense of direction, groped my way through the corridor that I vaguely remembered led to the front of the house.

I mounted three or four stairs, and, lifting a heavy curtain, found myself facing the starry fanlight of the porch. From here I glanced into the gloom of the dining-room. My fingers were on the latch of the outer door when I heard a faint stirring in the darkness above the hall. I looked up and became conscious of, rather than saw, the huddled old figure looking down on me.

There was an immense hushed pause. Then, "Arthur, Arthur," whispered an inexpressibly peevish, rasping voice, "is that you? Is that you, Arthur?"

I can scarcely say why, but the question horribly startled me. No conceivable answer occurred to me. With head craned back, hand clenched on my umbrella, I continued to stare up into the gloom, in this fatuous confrontation.

"Oh, oh"; the voice croaked. "It is you, is it? *That* disgusting man! . . . Go away out. Go away out."

Hesitating no longer, I caught open the door and, slamming it behind me, ran out into the garden, under the gigantic old sycamore, and so out at the open gate.

I found myself half up the village street before I stopped running. The local butcher was sitting in his shop reading a piece of newspaper by the light of a small oil-lamp. I crossed the road and enquired the way to the station. And after he had with minute and needless care directed me, I asked casually if Mr. Arthur Seaton still lived with his aunt at the big house just beyond the village. He poked his head in at the little parlour door.

"Here's a gentleman enquiring after young Mr. Seaton, Millie," he said. "He's dead, ain't he?"

"Why, yes, bless you," replied a cheerful voice from within. "Dead and buried these three months or more—young Mr. Seaton. And just before he was to be married, don't you remember, Bob?"

I saw a fair young woman's face peer over the muslin of the little door at me.

"Thank you," I replied, "then I go straight on?"

"That's it, sir; past the pond, bear up the hill a bit to the left, and then there's the station lights before your eyes."

We looked intelligently into each other's faces in the beam of the smoky lamp. But not one of the many questions in my mind could I put into words.

And again I paused irresolutely a few paces further on. It was not fancy, merely a foolish apprehension of what the raw-boned butcher might "think" that prevented my going back to see if I could find Seaton's grave in the benighted churchyard. There was precious little use in pottering about in the muddy dark, merely to discover where he was buried. And yet I felt a little uneasy. My rather horrible thought was that, so far as I was concerned—one of his extremely few friends—he had never been much better than "buried" in my mind.

Edward Lucas White

LUKUNDOO

from LUKUNDOO

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It stands to reason," said Twombly, "that a man must accept the evidence of his own eyes, and when eyes and ears agree, there can be no doubt. He has to believe what he has both seen and heard."

"Not always," put in Singleton, softly.

Every man turned toward Singleton. Twombly was standing on the hearth-rug, his back to the grate, his legs spread out, with his habitual air of dominating the room. Singleton, as usual, was as much as possible effaced in a corner. But when Singleton spoke he said something. We faced him in that flattering spontaneity of expectant silence which invites utterance.

"I was thinking," he said, after an interval, "of something I both saw and heard in Africa."

Now, if there was one thing we had found impossible it had been to elicit from Singleton anything definite about his African experiences. As with the Alpinist in the story, who could tell only that he went up and came down, the sum of Singleton's revelations had been that he went there and came away. His words now riveted our attention at once. Twombly faded from the hearth-rug, but not one of us could ever recall having seen him go. The room readjusted itself, focused on Singleton, and there was some hasty and furtive lighting of fresh cigars. Singleton lit one also, but it went out immediately, and he never relit it.

1

We were in the Great Forest, exploring for pigmies. Van Rieten had a theory that the dwarfs found by Stanley and others were a mere cross-breed between ordinary negroes and the real pigmies. He hoped to discover a race of men three feet tall at most, or shorter. We had found no trace of any such beings.

Natives were few, game scarce; food, except game, there was none; and the deepest, dankest, drippingest forest all about. We were the only novelty in the country, no native we met had even seen a white man before, most had never heard of white men. All of a sudden, late one afternoon, there came into our camp an Englishman, and pretty well used up he was, too. We had heard no

rumor of him; he had not only heard of us but had made an amazing five-day march to reach us. His guide and two bearers were nearly as done up as he. Even though he was in tatters and had five days' beard on, you could see he was naturally dapper and neat and the sort of man to shave daily. He was small, but wiry. His face was the sort of British face from which emotion has been so carefully banished that a foreigner is apt to think the wearer of the face incapable of any sort of feeling; the kind of face which, if it has any expression at all, expresses principally the resolution to go through the world decorously, without intruding upon or annoying anyone.

His name was Etcham. He introduced himself modestly, and ate with us so deliberately that we should never have suspected, if our bearers had not had it from his bearers, that he had had but three meals in the five days, and those small. After we had lit up he told us why he had come.

"My chief is ve'y seedy," he said between puffs. "He is bound to go out if he keeps this way. I thought perhaps . . ."

He spoke quietly in a soft, even tone, but I could see little beads of sweat oozing out on his upper lip under his stubby mustache, and there was a tingle of repressed emotion in his tone, a veiled eagerness in his eye, a palpitating inward solicitude in his demeanor that moved me at once. Van Rieten had no sentiment in him; if he was moved he did not show it. But he listened. I was surprised at that. He was just the man to refuse at once. But he listened to Etcham's halting, diffident hints. He even asked questions.

"Who is your chief?"

"Stone," Etcham lisped.

That electrified both of us.

"Ralph Stone?" we ejaculated together.

Etcham nodded.

For some minutes Van Rieten and I were silent. Van Rieten had never seen him, but I had been a classmate of Stone's, and Van Rieten and I had discussed him over many a camp-fire. We had heard of him two years before, south of Luebo in the Balunda country, which had been ringing with his theatrical strife against a Balunda witch-doctor, ending in the sorcerer's complete discomfiture and the abasement of his tribe before Stone. They had even broken the fetishman's whistle and given Stone the pieces. It had been like the triumph of Elijah over the prophets of Baal, only more real to the Balunda.

We had thought of Stone as far off, if still in Africa at all, and here he turned up ahead of us and probably forestalling our quest.

II

Etcham's naming of Stone brought back to us all his tantalizing story, his fascinating parents, their tragic death; the brilliance of his college days; the dazzle of his millions; the promise of his young manhood; his wide notoriety, so nearly real fame; his romantic elopement with the meteoric authoress whose sudden cascade of fiction had made her so great a name so young, whose beauty

and charm were so much heralded; the frightful scandal of the breach-of-promise suit that followed; his bride's devotion through it all; their sudden quarrel after it was all over; their divorce; the too much advertised announcement of his approaching marriage to the plaintiff in the breach-of-promise suit; his precipitate remarriage to his divorced bride; their second quarrel and second divorce; his departure from his native land; his advent in the dark continent. The sense of all this rushed over me and I believe Van Rieten felt it, too, as he sat silent.

Then he asked:

"Where is Werner?"

"Dead," said Etcham. "He died before I joined Stone."

"You were not with Stone above Luebo?"

"No," said Etcham, "I joined him at Stanley Falls."

"Who is with him?" Van Rieten asked.

"Only his Zanzibar servants and the bearers," Etcham replied.

"What sort of bearers?" Van Rieten demanded.

"Mang-Battu men," Etcham responded simply.

Now that impressed both Van Rieten and myself greatly. It bore out Stone's reputation as a notable leader of men. For up to that time no one had been able to use Mang-Battu as bearers outside of their own country, or to hold them for long or difficult expeditions.

"Were you long among the Mang-Battu?" was Van Rieten's next question.

"Some weeks," said Etcham. "Stone was interested in them and made up a fair-sized vocabulary of their words and phrases. He had a theory that they are an offshoot of the Balunda and he found much confirmation in their customs."

"What do you live on?" Van Rieten enquired.

"Game, mostly," Etcham lisped.

"How long has Stone been laid up?" Van Rieten next asked.

"More than a month," Etcham answered.

"And you have been hunting for the camp?" Van Rieten exclaimed.

Etcham's face, burnt and flayed as it was, showed a flush.

"I missed some easy shots," he admitted ruefully. "I've not felt ve'y fit myself."

"What's the matter with your chief?" Van Rieten enquired.

"Something like carbuncles," Etcham replied.

"He ought to get over a carbuncle or two," Van Rieten declared.

"They are not carbuncles," Etcham explained. "Nor one or two. He has had dozens, sometimes five at once. If they had been carbuncles he would have been dead long ago. But in some ways they are not so bad, though in others they are worse."

"How do you mean?" Van Rieten queried.

"Well," Etcham hesitated, "they do not seem to inflame so deep nor so wide as carbuncles, nor to be so painful, nor to cause so much fever. But then they seem to be part of a disease that affects his mind. He let me help him dress the first, but the others he has hidden most carefully, from me and from the men. He keeps his tent when they puff up, and will not let me change the dressings or be with him at all."

"Have you plenty of dressings?" Van Rieten asked.

"We have some," said Etcham doubtfully. "But he won't use them; he washes out the dressings and uses them over and over."

"How is he treating the swellings?" Van Rieten enquired.

"He slices them off clear down to flesh level, with his razor."

"What?" Van Rieten shouted.

Etcham made no answer but looked him steadily in the eyes.

"I beg pardon," Van Rieten hastened to say. "You startled me. They can't be carbuncles. He'd have been dead long ago."

"I thought I had said they are not carbuncles," Etcham lisped.

"But the man must be crazy!" Van Rieten exclaimed.

"Just so," said Etcham. "He is beyond my advice or control."

"How many has he treated that way?" Van Rieten demanded.

"Two, to my knowledge," Etcham said.

"Two?" Van Rieten queried.

Etcham flushed again.

"I saw him," he confessed, "through a crack in the hut. I felt impelled to keep a watch on him, as if he was not responsible."

"I should think not," Van Rieten agreed. "And you saw him do that twice?"

"I conjecture," said Etcham, "that he did the like with all the rest."

"How many has he had?" Van Rieten asked.

"Dozens," Etcham lisped.

"Does he eat?" Van Rieten enquired.

"Like a wolf," said Etcham. "More than any two bearers."

"Can he walk?" Van Rieten asked.

"He crawls a bit, groaning," said Etcham simply.

"Little fever, you say," Van Rieten ruminated.

"Enough and too much," Etcham declared.

"Has he been delirious?" Van Rieten asked.

"Only twice," Etcham replied; "once when the first swelling broke, and once later. He would not let anyone come near him then. But we could hear him talking, talking steadily, and it scared the natives."

"Was he talking their patter in delirium?" Van Rieten demanded.

"No," said Etcham, "but he was talking some similar lingo. Hamed Burghash said he was talking Balunda. I know too little Balunda. I do not learn languages readily. Stone learned more Mang-Battu in a week than I could have learned in a year. But I seemed to hear words like Mang-Battu words. Anyhow the Mang-Battu bearers were scared."

"Scared?" Van Rieten repeated, questioningly.

"So were the Zanzibar men, even Hamed Burghash, and so was I," said Etcham, "only for a different reason. He talked in two voices."

"In two voices," Van Rieten reflected.

"Yes," said Etcham, more excitedly than he had yet spoken. "In two voices, like a conversation. One was his own, one a small, thin, bleaty voice like nothing I ever heard. I seemed to make out, among the sounds the deep voice made,

something like Mang-Battu words I knew, as *nedru, metababa,* and *nedo,* their terms for 'head,' 'shoulder,' 'thigh,' and perhaps *kudra* and *nekere* ('speak' and 'whistle'); and among the noises of the shrill voice *matomipa, angunzi,* and *kamomami* ('kill,' 'death,' and 'hate'). Hamed Burghash said he also heard those words. He knew Mang-Battu far better than I."

"What did the bearers say?" Van Rieten asked.

"They said, *'Lukundoo, Lukundoo!'* " Etcham replied. "I did not know that word; Hamed Burghash said it was Mang-Battu for 'leopard.' "

"It's Mang-Battu for 'witchcraft,' " said Van Rieten.

"I don't wonder they thought so," said Etcham. "It was enough to make one believe in sorcery to listen to those two voices."

"One voice answering the other?" Van Rieten asked perfunctorily.

Etcham's face went gray under his tan.

"Sometimes both at once," he answered huskily.

"Both at once!" Van Rieten ejaculated.

"It sounded that way to the men, too," said Etcham. "And that was not all."

He stopped and looked helplessly at us for a moment.

"Could a man talk and whistle at the same time?" he asked.

"How do you mean?" Van Rieten queried.

"We could hear Stone talking away, his big, deep-chested baritone rumbling along, and through it all we could hear a high, shrill whistle, the oddest, wheezy sound. You know, no matter how shrilly a grown man may whistle, the note has a different quality from the whistle of a boy or a woman or a little girl. They sound more treble, somehow. Well, if you can imagine the smallest girl who could whistle keeping it up tunelessly right along, that whistle was like that, only even more piercing, and it sounded right through Stone's bass tones."

"And you didn't go to him?" Van Rieten cried.

"He is not given to threats," Etcham disclaimed. "But he had threatened, not volubly, nor like a sick man, but quietly and firmly, that if any man of us (he lumped me in with the men), came near him while he was in his trouble, that man should die. And it was not so much his words as his manner. It was like a monarch commanding respected privacy for a death-bed. One simply could not transgress."

"I see," said Van Rieten shortly.

"He's ve'y seedy," Etcham repeated helplessly. "I thought perhaps. . . ."

His absorbing affection for Stone, his real love for him, shone out through his envelope of conventional training. Worship of Stone was plainly his master passion.

Like many competent men, Van Rieten had a streak of hard selfishness in him. It came to the surface then. He said he carried our lives in our hands from day to day just as genuinely as Stone; that he did not forget the ties of blood and calling between any two explorers, but that there was no sense in imperiling one party for a very problematical benefit to a man probably beyond any help; that it was enough of a task to hunt for one party; that if two were united, providing food would be more than doubly difficult; that the risk of starvation was too

great. Deflecting our march seven full days' journey (he complimented Etcham on his marching powers) might ruin our expedition entirely.

3

Van Rieten had logic on his side and he had a way with him. Etcham sat there apologetic and deferential, like a fourth-form schoolboy before a head master. Van Rieten wound up.

"I am after pigmies, at the risk of my life. After pigmies I go."

"Perhaps, then, these will interest you," said Etcham, very quietly.

He took two objects out of the sidepocket of his blouse, and handed them to Van Rieten. They were round, bigger than big plums, and smaller than small peaches, about the right size to enclose in an average hand. They were black, and at first I did not see what they were.

"Pigmies!" Van Rieten exclaimed. "Pigmies, indeed! Why, they wouldn't be two feet high! Do you mean to claim that these are adult heads?"

"I claim nothing," Etcham answered evenly. "You can see for yourself."

Van Rieten passed one of the heads to me. The sun was just setting and I examined it closely. A dried head it was, perfectly preserved, and the flesh as hard as Argentine jerked beef. A bit of a vertebra stuck out where the muscles of the vanished neck had shriveled into folds. The puny chin was sharp on a projecting jaw, the minute teeth white and even between the retracted lips, the tiny nose was flat, the little forehead retreating, there were inconsiderable clumps of stunted wool on the Lilliputian cranium. There was nothing babyish, childish or youthful about the head, rather it was mature to senility.

"Where did these come from?" Van Rieten enquired.

"I do not know," Etcham replied precisely. "I found them among Stone's effects while rummaging for medicines or drugs or anything that could help me to help him. I do not know where he got them. But I'll swear he did not have them when we entered this district."

"Are you sure?" Van Rieten queried, his eyes big and fixed on Etcham's.

"Ve'y sure," lisped Etcham.

"But how could he have come by them without your knowledge?" Van Rieten demurred.

"Sometimes we were apart ten days at a time hunting," said Etcham. "Stone is not a talking man. He gave me no account of his doings and Hamed Burghash keeps a still tongue and a tight hold on the men."

"You have examined these heads?" Van Rieten asked.

"Minutely," said Etcham.

Van Rieten took out his notebook. He was a methodical chap. He tore out a leaf, folded it and divided it equally into three pieces. He gave one to me and one to Etcham.

"Just for a test of my impressions," he said, "I want each of us to write separately just what he is most reminded of by these heads. Then I want to compare the writings."

I handed Etcham a pencil and he wrote. Then he handed the pencil back to me and I wrote.

"Read the three," said Van Rieten, handing me his piece.

Van Rieten had written:

"An old Balunda witch-doctor."

Etcham had written:

"An old Mang-Battu fetish-man."

I had written:

"An old Katongo magician."

"There!" Van Rieten exclaimed. "Look at that! There is nothing Wagabi or Batwa or Wambuttu or Wabotu about these heads. Nor anything pigmy either."

"I thought as much," said Etcham.

"And you say he did not have them before?"

"To a certainty he did not," Etcham asserted.

"It is worth following up," said Van Rieten. "I'll go with you. And first of all, I'll do my best to save Stone."

He put out his hand and Etcham clasped it silently. He was grateful all over.

4

Nothing but Etcham's fever of solicitude could have taken him in five days over the track. It took him eight days to retrace with full knowledge of it and our party to help. We could not have done it in seven, and Etcham urged us on, in a repressed fury of anxiety, no mere fever of duty to his chief, but a real ardor of devotion, a glow of personal adoration for Stone which blazed under his dry conventional exterior and showed in spite of him.

We found Stone well cared for. Etcham had seen to a good, high thorn *zareeba* round the camp, the huts were well built, and thatched and Stone's was as good as their resources would permit. Hamed Burghash was not named after two Seyyids for nothing. He had in him the making of a sultan. He had kept the Mang-Battu together, not a man had slipped off, and he had kept them in order. Also he was a deft nurse and a faithful servant.

The two other Zanzibaris had done some creditable hunting. Though all were hungry, the camp was far from starvation.

Stone was on a canvas cot and there was a sort of collapsible camp-stool-table, like a Turkish tabouret, by the cot. It had a water-bottle and some vials on it and Stone's watch, also his razor in its case.

Stone was clean and not emaciated, but he was far gone; not unconscious, but in a daze; past commanding or resisting anyone. He did not seem to see us enter or to know we were there. I should have recognized him anywhere. His boyish dash and grace had vanished utterly, of course. But his head was even more leonine; his hair was still abundant, yellow and wavy; the close, crisped blond beard he had grown during his illness did not alter him. He was big and big-chested yet. His eyes were dull and he mumbled and babbled mere meaningless syllables, not words.

Etcham helped Van Rieten to uncover him and look him over. He was in good muscle for a man so long bedridden. There were no scars on him except about his knees, shoulders and chest. On each knee and above it he had a full score of roundish cicatrices, and a dozen or more on each shoulder, all in front. Two or three were open wounds and four or five barely healed. He had no fresh swellings, except two, one on each side, on his pectoral muscles, the one on the left being higher up and farther out than the other. They did not look like boils or carbuncles, but as if something blunt and hard were being pushed up through the fairly healthy flesh and skin, not much inflamed.

"I should not lance those," said Van Rieten, and Etcham assented.

They made Stone as comfortable as they could, and just before sunset we looked in at him again. He was lying on his back, and his chest showed big and massive yet, but he lay as if in a stupor. We left Etcham with him and went into the next hut, which Etcham had resigned to us. The jungle noises were no different there than anywhere else for months past, and I was soon fast asleep.

5

Sometime in the pitch dark I found myself awake and listening. I could hear two voices, one Stone's, the other sibilant and wheezy. I knew Stone's voice after all the years that had passed since I heard it last. The other was like nothing I remembered. It had less volume than the wail of a new-born baby, yet there was an insistent carrying power to it, like the shrilling of an insect. As I listened I heard Van Rieten breathing near me in the dark, then he heard me and realized that I was listening, too. Like Etcham I knew little Balunda, but I could make out a word or two. The voices alternated with intervals of silence between.

Then suddenly both sounded at once and fast. Stone's baritone basso, full as if he were in perfect health, and that incredibly stridulous falsetto, both jabbering at once like the voices of two people quarreling and trying to talk each other down.

"I can't stand this," said Van Rieten. "Let's have a look at him."

He had one of those cylindrical electric night-candles. He fumbled about for it, touched the button and beckoned me to come with him. Outside of the hut he motioned me to stand still, and instinctively turned off the light, as if seeing made listening difficult.

Except for a faint glow from the embers of the bearers' fire we were in complete darkness, little starlight struggled through the trees, the river made but a faint murmur. We could hear the two voices together and then suddenly the creaking voice changed into a razor-edged, slicing whistle, indescribably cutting, continuing right through Stone's grumbling torrent of croaking words.

"Good God!" exclaimed Van Rieten.

Abruptly he turned on the light.

We found Etcham utterly asleep, exhausted by his long anxiety and the exertions of his phenomenal march and relaxed completely now that the load was

in a sense shifted from his shoulders to Van Rieten's. Even the light on his face did not wake him.

The whistle had ceased and the two voices now sounded together. Both came from Stone's cot, where the concentrated white ray showed him lying just as we had left him, except that he had tossed his arms above his head and had torn the coverings and bandages from his chest.

The swelling on his right breast had broken. Van Rieten aimed the center line of the light at it and we saw it plainly. From his flesh, grown out of it, there protruded a head, such a head as the dried specimens Etcham had shown us, as if it were a miniature of the head of a Balunda fetish-man. It was black, shining black as the blackest African skin; it rolled the whites of its wicked, wee eyes and showed its microscopic teeth between lips repulsively negroid in their red fullness, even in so diminutive a face. It had crisp, fuzzy wool on its minikin skull, it turned malignantly from side to side and chittered incessantly in that inconceivable falsetto. Stone babbled brokenly against its patter.

Van Rieten turned from Stone and waked Etcham, with some difficulty. When he was awake and saw it all, Etcham stared and said not one word.

"You saw him slice off two swellings?" Van Rieten asked.

Etcham nodded, chokingly.

"Did he bleed much?" Van Rieten demanded.

"Ve'y little," Etcham replied.

"You hold his arms," said Van Rieten to Etcham.

He took up Stone's razor and handed me the light. Stone showed no sign of seeing the light or of knowing we were there. But the little head mewled and screeched at us.

Van Rieten's hand was steady, and the sweep of the razor even and true. Stone bled amazingly little and Van Rieten dressed the wound as if it had been a bruise or scrape.

Stone had stopped talking the instant the excrescent head was severed. Van Rieten did all that could be done for Stone and then fairly grabbed the light from me. Snatching up a gun he scanned the ground by the cot and brought the butt down once and twice, viciously.

We went back to our hut, but I doubt if I slept.

6

Next day, near noon, in broad daylight, we heard the two voices from Stone's hut. We found Etcham dropped asleep by his charge. The swelling on the left had broken, and just such another head was there miauling and spluttering. Etcham woke up and the three of us stood there and glared. Stone interjected hoarse vocables into the tinkling gurgle of the portent's utterance.

Van Rieten stepped forward, took up Stone's razor and knelt down by the cot. The atomy of a head squealed a wheezy snarl at him.

Then suddenly Stone spoke English.

"Who are you with my razor?"

Van Rieten started back and stood up.

Stone's eyes were clear now and bright, they roved about the hut.

"The end," he said; "I recognize the end. I seem to see Etcham, as if in life. But Singleton! Ah, Singleton! Ghosts of my boyhood come to watch me pass! And you, strange specter with the black beard and my razor! Aroint ye all!"

"I'm no ghost, Stone," I managed to say. "I'm alive. So are Etcham and Van Rieten. We are here to help you."

"Van Rieten!" he exclaimed. "My work passes on to a better man. Luck go with you, Van Rieten."

Van Rieten went nearer to him.

"Just hold still a moment, old man," he said soothingly. "It will be only one twinge."

"I've held still for many such twinges," Stone answered quite distinctly. "Let me be. Let me die in my own way. The hydra was nothing to this. You can cut off ten, a hundred, a thousand heads, but the curse you can not cut off, or take off. What's soaked into the bone won't come out of the flesh, any more than what's bred there. Don't hack me any more. Promise!"

His voice had all the old commanding tone of his boyhood and it swayed Van Rieten as it always had swayed everybody.

"I promise," said Van Rieten.

Almost as he said the word Stone's eyes filmed again.

Then we three sat about Stone and watched that hideous, gibbering prodigy grow up out of Stone's flesh, till two horrid, spindling little black arms disengaged themselves. The infinitesimal nails were perfect to the barely perceptible moon at the quick, the pink spot on the palm was horridly natural. These arms gesticulated and the right plucked toward Stone's blond beard.

"I can't stand this," Van Rieten exclaimed and took up the razor again.

Instantly Stone's eyes opened, hard and glittering.

"Van Rieten break his word?" he enunciated slowly. "Never!"

"But we must help you," Van Rieten gasped.

"I am past all help and all hurting," said Stone. "This is my hour. This curse is not put on me; it grew out of me, like this horror here. Even now I go."

His eyes closed and we stood helpless, the adherent figure spouting shrill sentences.

In a moment Stone spoke again.

"You speak all tongues?" he asked quickly.

And the emergent minikin replied in sudden English:

"Yea, verily, all that you speak," putting out its microscopic tongue, writhing its lips and wagging its head from side to side. We could see the thready ribs on its exiguous flanks heave as if the thing breathed.

"Has she forgiven me?" Stone asked in a muffled strangle.

"Not while the moss hangs from the cypresses," the head squeaked. "Not while the stars shine on Lake Ponchartrain will she forgive."

And then Stone, all with one motion, wrenched himself over on his side. The next instant he was dead.

When Singleton's voice ceased the room was hushed for a space. We could hear each other breathing. Twombly, the tactless, broke the silence.

"I presume," he said, "you cut off the little minikin and brought it home in alcohol."

Singleton turned on him a stern countenance.

"We buried Stone," he said, "unmutilated as he died."

"But," said the unconscionable Twombly, "the whole thing is incredible."

Singleton stiffened.

"I did not expect you to believe it," he said; "I began by saying that although I heard and saw it, when I look back on it I cannot credit it myself."

SECTION III

HUMAN AND INHUMAN STORIES

Michael Arlen

THE GENTLEMAN FROM AMERICA

from MAY FAIR

George H. Doran Company

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1

It is told by a decayed gentleman at the sign of "The Leather Butler," which is in Shepherd's Market, which is in Mayfair, how one night three men behaved in a most peculiar way; and one of them was left for dead.

Towards twelve o'clock on a night in the month of November some years ago, three men were ascending the noble stairway of a mansion in Grosvenor Square. The mansion, although appointed in every detail—to suit, however, a severe taste—had yet a sour atmosphere, as of a house long untenanted but by caretakers.

The first of the men, for they ascended in single file, held aloft a kitchen candlestick, whilst his companions made the best progress they could among the deep shadows that the faulty light cast on the oaken stairway. He who went last, the youngest of the three, said gaily:

"Mean old bird, my aunt! Cutting off the electric light just because she is away."

"Fur goodness' sake!" said the other.

The leader, whose face the candlelight revealed as thin almost to asceticism, a face white and tired, finely moulded but soiled in texture by the dissipations of a man of the world, contented himself with a curt request to his young friend not to speak so loud.

It was, however, the gentleman in between the two whom it will advantage the reader to consider. This was an unusually tall and strongly-built man. Yet it was not his giant stature, but rather the assurance of his bearing, which was remarkable. His very clothes sat on his huge frame with an air of firmness, of finality, that, as even a glance at his two companions would show, is deprecated by English tailors, whose inflexible formula it is that the elegance of the casual is the only possible elegance for gentlemen of the mode. While his face had that weathered, yet untired and eager look which is the enviable possession of many Americans, and is commonly considered to denote, for reasons not very clearly defined, the quality known as Poise. Not, however, that this untired and eager look is, as some have supposed, the outward sign of a lack of interest in dissipation, but rather of an enthusiastic and naïve curiosity as to the varieties of

the same. The gentleman from America looked, in fine, to be a proper man; and one who, in his early thirties, had established a philosophy of which his comfort and his assurance of retaining it were the two poles, his easy perception of humbug the pivot, and his fearlessness the latitude and longitude.

It was on the second landing that the leader, whose name was Quillier, and on whom the dignity of an ancient baronetcy seemed to have an almost intolerably tiring effect, flung open a door. He did not pass into the room, but held the candlestick towards the gentleman from America. And his manner was so impersonal as to be almost rude, which is a fault of breeding when it is bored.

"The terms of the bet," said Quillier, "are that this candle must suffice you for the night. That is understood?"

"Sure, why not?" smiled the gentleman from America. "It's a bum bet, and it looks to me like a bum candle. But do I care? No, sir!"

"Further," continued the impersonal, pleasant voice, "that you are allowed no matches, and therefore cannot relight the candle when it has gone out. That if you can pass the night in that room, Kerr-Anderson and I pay you five hundred pounds. And *vice versâ*."

"That's all right, Quillier. We've got all that." The gentleman from America took the candle from Quillier's hand and looked into the room, but with no more than faint interest. In that faulty light little could be seen but the oak-panelling, the heavy hangings about the great bed, and a steel engraving of a Meissonier duellist lunging at them from a wall nearby.

"Seldom," said he, "have I seen a room look less haunted——"

"Ah," vaguely said Sir Cyril Quillier.

"But," said the gentleman from America, "since you and Kerr-Anderson insist on presenting me with five hundred pounds for passing the night in it, do I complain? No, sir!"

"Got your revolver?" queried young Kerr-Anderson, a chubby youth whose profession was dining out.

"That is so," said the gentleman from America.

Quillier said: "Well, Puce, I don't mind telling you that I had just as soon this silly business was over. I have been betting all my life, but I have always had a preference for those bets which did not turn on a man's life or death——"

"Say, listen, Quillier, you can't frighten me with that junk!" snapped Mr. Puce.

"My aunt," said young Kerr-Anderson, "will be very annoyed if anything happens and she gets to hear of it. She hates a corpse in her house more than any one I know. You're sure you are going on with it, Puce?"

"Boy, if Abraham Lincoln was to come up this moment and tell me Queen Anne was dead, I'd be as sure he was speaking the truth as that I'm going to spend this night in this old haunted room of your aunt's. Yes, sir! And now I'll give you good-night, boys. Warn your mothers to be ready to give you five hundred pounds to hand on to Howard Cornelius Puce."

"I like Americans," said Quillier vaguely. "They are so enthusiastic. Good-

night, Puce, and God bless you. I hope you have better luck than the last man who spent a night in that room. He was strangled. Good-night, my friend."

"Aw, have a heart!" growled Mr. Puce. "You get a guy so low with your talk that I feel I could put on a tall-hat and crawl under a snake."

II

The gentleman from America, alone in the haunted room, lost none of his composure. Indeed, if anything disturbed him at all, it was that, irritated by Quillier's manner at a dinner-party a few nights before, and knowing Quillier to be a bankrupt wastrel, he had allowed himself to be dared into this silly adventure and had thus deprived himself for one night of the amenities of his suite at Claridge's Hotel. Five hundred pounds more or less did not matter very much to Mr. Puce: although, to be sure, it was some consolation to know that five hundred pounds more or less must matter quite a deal to *Sir* Cyril Quillier, for all his swank. Mr. Puce, like a good American, following the Gospel according to Mr. Sinclair Lewis, always stressed the titles of any of his acquaintance.

Now, he contented himself with a very cursory examination of the dim, large room; he rapped, in an amateurish way, on the oak panels here and there for any sign of any "secret passage junk," but succeeded only in soiling his knuckles, and it was only when, fully clothed, he had thrown himself on the great bed that it occurred to him that five hundred pounds sterling was quite a pretty sum to have staked about a damfool haunted room.

The conclusion that naturally leapt to one's mind, thought Mr. Puce, was that the room must have something the matter with it, else would a hawk like Quillier have bet money on its qualities of terror? Mr. Puce had, indeed, suggested, when first the bet was put forward, that five hundred pounds was perhaps an unnecessary sum to stake on so idiotic a fancy; but Quillier had said in a very tired way that he never bet less than five hundred on anything, but that if Mr. Puce preferred to bet with poppycock and chicken-food, he, Quillier, would be pleased to introduce him to some very jolly children of his acquaintance.

Such thoughts persuaded Mr. Puce to rise and examine more carefully the walls and appointments of the room. But as the furniture was limited to the barest necessities, and as the oak-panelled walls appeared in the faint light to be much the same as any other walls, the gentleman from America swore vaguely and again reclined on the bed. It was a very comfortable bed.

He had made up his mind, however, that he would not sleep. He would watch out, thought Mr. Puce, for any sign of this ghost, and he would listen with the ears of a coyote, thought Mr. Puce, for any hint of those rapping noises, rude winds, musty odours, clanking of chains, and the like, with which, so Mr. Puce had always understood, the family ghosts of Britishers invariably heralded their foul appearance.

Mr. Puce, you can see, did not believe in ghosts. He could not but think, however, that some low trick might be played on him, since on the honour of

Sir Cyril Quillier, peer though he was—for Mr. Puce, like a good American, could never get the cold dope on all this fancy title stuff—he had not the smallest reliance. But as to the supernatural, Mr. Puce's attitude was always a wholesome scepticism—and a rather aggressive scepticism at that, as Quillier had remarked with amusement when he had spoken of the ghost in, as he had put it, the house of Kerr-Anderson's aunt. Quillier had said:

"There are two sorts of men on whom ghosts have an effect: those who are silly enough to believe in them, and those who are silly enough not to believe in them."

Mr. Puce had been annoyed at that. He detested clever back-chat. "I'll tell the world," Mr. Puce had said, "that a plain American has to go to a drug-store after a conversation with you."

Mr. Puce, lying on the great bed, whose hangings depressed him, examined his automatic and found it good. He had every intention of standing no nonsense, and an automatic nine-shooter is, as Mr. Puce remembered having read somewhere, an Argument. Indeed, Mr. Puce was full of those dour witticisms about the effect of a "gun" on everyday life which go to make the less pretentious "movies" so entertaining; although, to be sure, he did not know more than a very little about guns. Travellers have remarked, however, that the exciting traditions behind a hundred per cent. American nationality have given birth in even the most gentle citizens of that great republic to a feeling of familiarity with "guns," as such homely phrases as "slick with the steel mit," "doggone son of a gun," and the like, go to prove.

Mr. Puce placed the sleek little automatic on a small table by the bed, on which stood the candle and, as he realised for the first time, a book. One glance at the paper-jacket of the book was enough to convince the gentleman from America that its presence there must be due to one of Quillier's tired ideas. It showed a woman of striking, if conventional, beauty, fighting for her life with a shape which might or might not be the wraith of a bloodhound but was certainly something quite outside a lovely woman's daily experience. Mr. Puce laughed. The book was called, *Tales of Terror for Tiny Tots*, by Ivor Pelham Marlay.

The gentleman from America was a healthy man, and needed his sleep; and it was therefore with relief that he turned to Mr. Marley's absurd-looking book as a means of keeping himself awake. The tale at which the book came open was called *The Phantom Footsteps;* and Mr. Puce prepared himself to be entertained, for he was not of those who read for instruction. He read:

THE PHANTOM FOOTSTEPS

The tale of The Phantom Footsteps is still whispered with awe and loathing among the people of that decayed but genteel district of London known to those who live in it as Belgravia and to others as Pimlico.

Julia and Geraldine Biggot-Baggot were twin sisters who lived with their father, a widower, in a town in Lancashire called Wigan, or it may have been

called Bolton. The tale finds Julia and Geraldine in their nineteenth year, and it also finds them in a very bad temper, for they were yearning for a more spacious life than can be found in Wigan, or it might be, Bolton. This yearning their neighbours found all the more inexplicable since the parents of the girls were of Lancashire stock, their mother having been a Biggot from Wigan and their father a Baggot from Bolton.

The reader can imagine with what excess of gaiety Julia and Geraldine heard one day from their father that he had inherited a considerable property from a distant relation; and the reader can go on imagining the exaltation of the girls when they heard that the property included a mansion in Belgravia, since that for which they had always yearned most was to enjoy, from a central situation, the glittering life of the metropolis.

The father preceded them from Wigan, or was it Bolton? He was a man of a tidy disposition, and wished to see that everything in the Belgravia house was ready against his daughters' arrival. When Julia and Geraldine did arrive, however, they were admitted by a genial old person of repellent aspect and disagreeable odour, who informed them that she was doing a bit of charing about the house but would be gone by the evening. Their father, she added, had gone into the country to engage servants, but would be back the next day; and he had instructed her to tell Julia and Geraldine not to be nervous of sleeping alone in a strange house, that there was nothing to be afraid of, and that he would, anyhow, be with them first thing in the morning.

Now Julia and Geraldine, though twins, were of vastly different temperaments; for whereas Julia was a girl of gay and indomitable spirit who knew not fear, Geraldine suffered from agonies of timidity and knew nothing else. When, for instance, night fell and found them alone in the house, Julia could scarcely contain her delight at the adventure; while it was with difficulty that Geraldine could support the tremors that shook her girlish frame.

Imagine, then, how differently they were affected when, as they lay in bed in their room towards the top of the house, they distinctly heard from far below a noise, as of some one moving. Julia sat up in bed, intent, unafraid, curious. Geraldine swooned.

"It's only a cat," Julia whispered. "I'm going down to see."

"Don't!" sighed Geraldine. "For pity's *sake* don't leave me, Julia!"

"Oh, don't be so childish!" snapped Julia. "Whenever there's the chance of the least bit of fun you get shivers down your spine. But as you are so frightened I will lock the door from the outside and take the key with me, so that no one can get in when I am not looking. Oh, I hope it's a burglar! I'll give him the fright of his life, see if I don't."

And the indomitable girl went, feeling her way to the door in darkness, for to have switched on the light would have been to warn the intruder, if there was one, that the house was inhabited; whereas it was the plucky girl's conceit to turn the tables on the burglar, if there was one, by suddenly appearing to him as an avenging phantom; for having done not a little district-visiting in Wigan,

or, possibly, Bolton, no one knew better than Julia of the depths of base superstition among the vulgar.

A little calmed by her sister's nonchalance, Geraldine lay still as a mouse in the darkness, with her pretty head beneath the bedclothes. From without came not a sound, and the very stillness of the house had impelled Geraldine to a new access of terror had she not concentrated on the works of Mr. Rudyard Kipling, which tell of the grit of the English people.

Then, as though to test the grit of the English people in the most abominable way, came a dull noise from below. Geraldine restrained a scream, lay breathless in the darkness. The dull noise, however, was not repeated, and presently Geraldine grew a little calmer, thinking that maybe her sister had dropped a slipper or something of the sort. But the reader can imagine into what terror the poor girl had been plunged had she been a student of the detective novels of the day, for then she must instantly have recognised the dull noise as a dull thud, and what can a dull thud mean but one thing?

It was as she was praying a prayer to Our Lady that her ears grew aware of footsteps ascending the stairs. Her first feeling was one of infinite relief. Of course Julia had been right, and there had been nothing downstairs but a cat or, perhaps, a dog. And now Julia was returning, and in a second they would have a good laugh together. Indeed, it was all Geraldine could do to restrain herself from jumping out of bed to meet her sister, when she was assailed by a terrible doubt; and on the instant her mind grew so charged with fear that she could no longer hold back her sobs. Suppose it was not Julia ascending! Suppose. . . "Oh, God!" sobbed Geraldine.

Transfixed with terror, yet hopeful of the best, the poor girl could not even command herself to re-insert her head beneath the sheets. And always the ascending steps came nearer. As they approached the door, she thought she would die of uncertainty. But as the key was fitted into the lock she drew a deep breath of relief—to be at once shaken by the most acute agony of doubt, so that she had given anything in the world to be back again in Wigan, or, even better, Bolton.

"Julia!" she sobbed. "Julia!"

For the door had opened, the footsteps were in the room, and Geraldine thought she recognised her sister's maidenly tread. But why did Julia not speak, why this intolerable silence? Geraldine, peer as hard as she might, could make out nothing in the darkness. The footsteps seemed to fumble in their direction, but came always nearer to the bed, in which poor Geraldine lay more dead than alive. Oh, why did Julia not speak, just to reassure her?

"Julia!" sobbed Geraldine. "Julia!"

The footsteps seemed to fumble about the floor with an indecision maddening to Geraldine's distraught nerves. But at last they came beside the bed—and there they stood! In the awful silence Geraldine could hear her heart beating like a hammer on a bell.

"Oh!" the poor girl screamed. "What is it, Julia? Why don't you speak?"

But never a sound nor a word gave back the livid silence, never a sigh nor a breath, though Julia must be standing within a yard of the bed.

"Oh, she is only trying to frighten me, the beast!" poor Geraldine thought; and, unable for another second to bear the cruel silence, she timidly stretched out a hand to touch her sister—when, to her infinite relief, her fingers touched the white rabbit-fur with which Julia's dressing-gown was delicately trimmed.

"You beast, Julia!" she sobbed and laughed. Never a word, however, came from the still shape. Geraldine, impatient of the continuation of a joke which seemed to her in the worst of taste, raised her hand from the fur, that she might touch her sister's face; but her fingers had risen no farther than Julia's throat when they touched something wet and warm, and with a scream of indescribable terror Geraldine fainted away.

When Mr. Biggot-Baggot admitted himself into the house early the next morning, his eyes were assailed by a dreadful sight. At the foot of the stairs was a pool of blood, from which, in a loathsome trail, drops of blood wound up the stairway.

Mr. Biggot-Baggot, fearful lest something out of the way had happened to his beloved daughters, rushed frantically up the stairs. The trail of blood led to his daughters' room; and there, in the doorway, the poor gentleman stood appalled, so foul was the sight that met his eyes. His beloved Geraldine lay on the bed, her hair snow-white, her lips raving with the shrill fancies of a maniac. While on the floor beside the bed lay stretched, in a pool of blood, his beloved Julia, her head half-severed from her trunk.

The tragic story unfolded only when the police arrived. It then became clear that Julia, her head half-severed from her body, and therefore a corpse, had yet, with indomitable purpose, come upstairs to warn her timid sister against the homicidal lunatic who, just escaped from an asylum near by, had penetrated into the house. However, the police consoled the distracted father not a little by pointing out that the escape of the homicidal lunatic from the asylum had done some good, insomuch as there would now be room in an asylum near her home for Geraldine.

3

When the gentleman from America had read the last line of *The Phantom Footsteps* he closed the book with a slam, and, in his bitter impatience with the impossible work, was making to hurl it across the room, when, unfortunately, his circling arm overturned the candle. The candle, of course, went out.

"Aw hell!" said Mr. Puce bitterly, and he thought: "Another good mark to *Sir* Cyril Quillier! Won't I Sir him one some day! For only a lousy guy with a face like a drummer's overdraft would have bought a damfool book like that."

The tale of *The Phantom Footsteps* had annoyed him very much; but what annoyed him even more was the candle's extinction, for the gentleman from America knew himself too well to bet a nickel on his chances of remaining awake in a dark room.

He did, however, manage to keep awake for some time merely by concentrating on wicked words: on Quillier's face, and how its tired, mocking expres-

sion would change for the better were his, Puce's, foot to be firmly pressed down on its surface, and on Julia and Geraldine. For the luckless twins, by the almost criminal idiocy with which they were presented, kept walking about Mr. Puce's mind; and as he began to nod to the demands of a healthy and tired body he could not resist wondering if their home-town had been Wigan or Bolton and if Julia's head had been severed from ear to ear or only half-way. . . .

When he awoke, it was the stillness of the room that impressed his sharply-awakened senses. The room was very still.

"Who's there!" snapped Mr. Puce. Then, really awake, laughed at himself. "Say, what would plucky little Julia have done?" he thought, chuckling. "Why, got up and looked!"

But the gentleman from America discovered in himself a reluctance to move from the bed. He was very comfortable on the bed. Besides, he had no light and could see nothing if he did move. Besides, he had heard nothing at all, not the faintest noise. He had merely awoken rather more sharply than usual. . . .

Suddenly, he sat up on the bed, his back against the oak head. Something had moved in the room. He was certain something had moved. Somewhere by the foot of the bed.

"Aw, drop that!" laughed Mr. Puce.

His eyes peering into the darkness, Mr. Puce stretched his right hand to the table on which stood the automatic. The gesture reminded him of Geraldine's when she had touched the white rabbit-fur. Aw, Geraldine nothing! These idiotic twins kept chasing about a man's mind. The gentleman from America grasped the automatic firmly in his hand. His hand felt as though it had been born grasping an automatic.

"I want to tell you," said Mr. Puce into the darkness, "that some one is now going to have something coming to him, her, or it."

It was quite delicious, the feeling that he was not frightened. He had always known he was a helluva fellow. But he had never been quite certain. Now he was certain. He was the regular.

But, if anything had moved, it moved no more. Maybe, though, nothing had moved at all, ever. Maybe it was only his half-awakened senses that had played him a trick. He was rather sorry if that was so. He was just beginning to enjoy the evening.

The room was very still. The gentleman from America could only hear himself breathing.

Something moved again, distinctly.

"What the hell!" snapped Mr. Puce.

He levelled the automatic towards the foot of the bed.

"I will now," said Mr. Puce grimly, "shoot."

The room was very still. The gentleman from America wished, forcibly, that he had a light. It was no good leaving the bed without a light. He'd only fall over the infernal thing, whatever it was. What would plucky little Julia have done? Aw, Julia nothing! He strained his ears to catch another movement, but

he could only hear himself breathing—in short, sharp, gasps! The gentleman from America pulled himself together.

"Say, listen!" he snapped into the darkness. "I am going to count ten. I am then going to shoot. In the meanwhile you can make up your mind whether or not you are going to stay right here to watch the explosion. One. Two. Three. Four. . . ."

Then Mr. Puce interrupted himself. He had to. It was so funny. He laughed. He heard himself laugh, and again it was quite delicious, the feeling that he was not frightened. And wouldn't they laugh, the boys at the Booster Club back home, when he sprung this yarn on them! He could hear them. Oh, Boy! Say, listen, trying to scare him, Howard Cornelius Puce, with a ghost like that! Aw, it was like shooting craps with a guy that couldn't count. Poor old Quillier! Never bet less than five hundred on anything, didn't he, the poor boob! Well, there wasn't a ghost made, with or without a head on him, that could put the wind up Howard Puce. No, sir!

For, as his eyes had grown accustomed to the darkness, and helped by the mockery of light that the clouded, moonless night just managed to thrust through the distant window, the gentleman from America had been able to make out a form at the foot of the bed. He could only see its upper half, and that appeared to end above the throat. The phantom had no head. Whereas, Julia's head had been only half-severed from—aw, what the hell!

"A family like the Kerr-Andersons," began Mr. Puce, chuckling—but suddenly found, to his astonishment, that he was shouting at the top of his voice; anyhow, it sounded so. However, he began again, much lower, but still chuckling:

"Say, listen, Mr. Ghost, a family like the Kerr-Andersons might have afforded a head and a suit of clothes for their family ghost. Sir, you are one big bum phantom!" Again unaccountably, Mr. Puce found himself shouting at the top of his voice. "I am going on counting," he added grimly.

And, his automatic levelled at the thing's heart, the gentleman from America went on counting. His voice was steady.

"Five . . . six. . . ."

He sat crouched at the head of the bed, his eyes never off the thing's breast. Phantom nothing! He didn't believe in that no-head bunk. What the hell! He thought of getting a little nearer the foot of the bed and catching the thing a whack on that invisible head of his, but decided to stay where he was.

"Seven . . . eight. . . ."

He hadn't seen the hands before. Gee, some hands! And arms! Holy Moses, he'd got long arms to him, he had. . . .

"Nine!" said the gentleman from America.

Christopher and Columbus, but this would make some tale back home! Yes, sir! Not a bad idea of Quillier's that, though! Those arms. Long as old glory . . . long as the bed! Not bad for *Sir* Cyril Quillier, that idea. . . .

"Ten, you swine!" yelled the gentleman from America, and fired.

Some one laughed. Mr. Puce quite distinctly heard himself laughing, and

that made him laugh again. Fur goodness' sake, what a shot! Missed from that distance!

His eyes, as he made to take aim again, were bothered by the drops of sweat from his forehead. "Aw, what the hell!" said Mr. Puce, and fired again.

The silence after the second shot was like a black cloud on the darkness. Mr. Puce thought out the wickedest word he knew, and said it. Well, he wasn't going to miss again. No sir! His hand was steady as iron, too. Iron was his second name. And again the gentleman from America found it quite delicious, the feeling that he was not frightened. Attaboy! The drops of sweat from his forehead bothered him, though. Aw, what the hell, that was only excitement.

He raised his arm for the third shot. Jupiter and Jane, but he'd learn that ghost to stop ghosting! He was certainly sorry for that ghost. He wished, though, that he could concentrate more on the actual body of the headless thing. There it was, darn it, at the foot of the bed, staring at him—well, it would have been staring at him if it had a head. Aw, of course it had a head! It was only Quillier with his lousy face in a black wrap. *Sir* Cyril Quillier'd get one piece of lead in him this time, though. His own fault, the bastard.

"Say, listen, Quillier," said the gentleman from America. "I want to tell you that unless you quit, you are a corpse. Now I mean it, sure as my name is Howard Cornelius Puce. I have been shooting to miss so far. Yes, sir. But I am now *an*noyed."

If only though he could concentrate more on the body of the thing. His eyes kept wandering to the hands and arms. Gee, but they sure were long, those arms! As long as the bed, no less. Just long enough for the hands to get at him from the foot of the bed. And that's what they were at, what's more! Coming nearer. What the hell! They were moving, those doggone arms, nearer and nearer. . . .

Mr. Puce fired again.

That was no miss. He knew that was no miss. Right through the heart, that little boy must have gone. In that darkness he couldn't see more than just the shape of the thing. But it was still now. The arms were still. They weren't moving any more. The gentleman from America chuckled. That one had shown him it's a wise little ghost that stops ghosting. Yes, sir! It would fall in a moment, dead as Argentine mutton.

Mr. Puce then swore. Those arms were moving again. The hands weren't a yard from him now. What the hell! They were for his throat, God-dammit.

"The swine!" sobbed the gentleman from America, and fired again. But he wouldn't wait this time. No, sir! He'd let that ghost have a ton of lead. Mr. Puce fired again. Those hands weren't half a yard from his throat now. No good shooting at the hands though. Thing was to get the Thing through the heart. Mr. Puce fired the sixth bullet. Right into the thing's chest. The sweat bothered his eyes. "Aw, hell!" said Mr. Puce. He wished the bed was a bit longer. He couldn't get back any more. Those arms. . . . Holy Moses, long as hell, weren't they! Mr. Puce fired the seventh, eighth . . . ninth. Right into the thing. The revolver fell from Mr. Puce's shaking fingers. Mr. Puce heard himself screaming.

4

Towards noon on a summer's day several years later two men were sitting before an inn some miles from the ancient town of Lincoln. Drawn up in the shade of a towering ash was a large grey touring-car, covered with dust. On the worn table stood two tankards of ale. The travellers rested in silence and content, smoking.

The road by which the inn stood was really no more than a lane, and the peace of the motorists was not disturbed by the traffic of a main road. Indeed, the only human being visible was a distant speck on the dust, coming towards them. He seemed, however, to be making a good pace, for he soon drew near.

"If," said the elder of the two men, in a low, tired voice, "if we take the short cut through Carmion Wood, we will be at Malmanor for lunch."

"Then you'll go short-cutting alone," said the other firmly. "I've heard enough tales about Carmion Wood to last me a lifetime without my adding one more to them. And as for spooks, one is enough for this child in one lifetime, thanks very much."

The two men, for lack of any other distraction, watched the pedestrian draw near. He turned out to be a giant of a man; and had, apparently, no intention of resting at the inn. The very air of the tall pedestrian was a challenge to the lazy content of the sunlit noon. He was walking at a great pace, his felt hat swinging from his hand. A giant he was; his hair greying, his massive face set with assurance.

"By all that's holy!" gasped the elder of the two observers. A little lean gentleman that was, with a lined face which had been handsome in a striking way but for the haggard marks of the dissipations of a man of the world. He had only one arm, and that added a curiously flippant air of devilry to his little, lean, sardonic person.

"Puce!" yelled the other, a young man with a chubby, good-humoured face. "Puce, you silly old ass! Come here at once!"

The giant swung round at the good-natured cry, stared at the two smiling men. Then the massive face broke into the old, genial smile by which his friends had always known and loved the gentleman from America, and he came towards them with hand outstretched.

"Well, boys!" laughed Mr. Puce. "This is one big surprise. But it's good to see you again, I'll say that."

"The years have rolled on, Puce, the years have rolled on," sighed Quillier in his tired way, but warmly enough he shook the gentleman from America with his one hand.

"They certainly have!" said Mr. Puce, mopping his brow and smiling down on the two. "And by the look of that arm, Quillier, I'll say you're no stranger to war."

"Sit down, old Puce, and have a drink," laughed Kerr-Anderson. Always gay, was Kerr-Anderson.

But the gentleman from America seemed, as he stood there, uncertain. He glanced down the way he had come. Quillier, watching him, saw that he was fagged out. Eleven years had made a great difference to Mr. Puce. He looked old, worn, a wreck of the hearty giant who was once Howard Cornelius Puce.

"Come, sit down, Puce," he said kindly, and quite briskly, for him. "Do you realise, man, that it's eleven years since that idiotic night? What are you doing? Taking a walking-tour?"

Mr. Puce sat down on the stained bench beside them. His massive presence, his massive smile, seemed to fill the whole air about the two men.

"Walking-tour? That is so, more or less," smiled Mr. Puce; and, with a flash of his old humour: "I want to tell you boys that I am the daughter of the King of Egypt, but I am dressed as a man because I am travelling *incognita*. Eleven years is it, since we met? A whale of a time, eleven years!"

"Why, there's been quite a war since then," chuckled Kerr-Anderson. "But still that night seems like last night. I *am* glad to see you again, old Puce! But, by Heaven, we owe you one for giving us the scare of our lives! Don't we, Quillier?"

"That's right, Puce," smiled Quillier. "We owe you one all right. But I am heartily glad that it was only a shock you had, and that you were quite yourself after all. And so here we are gathered together again by blind chance, eleven years older, eleven years wiser. Have a drink, Puce?"

The gentleman from America was looking from one to the other of the two. The smile on the massive face seemed one of utter bewilderment. Quillier was shocked at the ravages of a mere eleven years on the man's face.

"I gave you two a scare!" echoed Mr. Puce. "Aw, put it to music, boys! What the hell! How the blazes did I give you two a scare?"

Kerr-Anderson was quite delighted to explain. The scare of eleven years ago was part of the fun of to-day. Many a time he had told the tale to while away the boredom of Flanders and Mesopotamia, and had often wanted to let old Puce in on it to enjoy the joke on Quillier and himself, but had never had the chance to get hold of him.

They had thought, that night, that Puce was dead. Quillier, naked from the waist up, had rushed down to Kerr-Anderson, waiting in the dark porch, and had told him that Puce had kicked the bucket. Quillier had sworn like nothing on earth as he dashed on his clothes. Awkward, Puce's corpse, for Quillier and Kerr-Anderson. Quillier, thank Heaven, had had the sense not to leave the empty revolver on the bed. They shoved back all the ghost properties into a bag. And as, of course, the house wasn't Kerr-Anderson's aunt's house at all, but Johnny Paramour's, who was away, they couldn't so easily be traced. Still, awkward for them, very. They cleared the country that night. Quillier swearing all the way about the weak hearts of giants. And it wasn't until the Orient Express had pitched them out at Vienna that they saw in the Continental *Daily Mail* that an American of the name of Puce had been found by the caretaker in the bedroom of a house in Grosvenor Square, suffering from shock and nervous break-

down. Poor old Puce! Good old Puce! But he'd had the laugh on them all right. . . .

And heartily enough the gentleman from America appeared to enjoy the joke on Quillier and Kerr-Anderson.

"That's good!" he laughed. "That's very good!"

"Of course," said Quillier in his tired, deprecating way, "we took the stake, this boy and I. For if you hadn't collapsed you would certainly have run out of that room like a Mussulman from a ham-sandwich."

"That's all right," laughed Mr. Puce. "But what I want to know, Quillier, is how you got me so scared?"

Kerr-Anderson says now that Puce was looking at Quillier quite amiably. Full in the face, and very close to him, but quite amiably. Quillier smiled, in his deprecating way.

"Oh, an old trick, Puce! A black rag over the head, a couple of yards of stuffed cloth for arms—"

"Aw, steady!" said Mr. Puce. But quite amiably. "Say, listen, I shot at you! Nine times. How about that?"

"Dear, oh dear!" laughed Kerr-Anderson. But that was the last time he laughed that day.

"My dear Puce," said Quillier gently, slightly waving his one arm. "That is the oldest trick of all. I was in a panic all the time that you would think of it and chuck the gun at my head. Those bullets in your automatic were blanks."

Kerr-Anderson isn't at all sure what exactly happened then. All he remembers is that Puce's huge face had suddenly gone crimson, which made his hair stand out shockingly white; and that Puce had Quillier's fragile throat between his hands; and that Puce was roaring and spitting into Quillier's blackening face.

"Say, listen, you Quillier! You'd scare me like that, would you! You'd scare me with a chicken's trick like that, would you! And you'd strangle me, eh? You swine, you *Sir* Cyril Quillier, you, right here's where the strangling comes in, and it's me that's going to do it—"

Kerr-Anderson hit out and yelled. Quillier was helpless with his one arm, the giant's grip on his throat. The woman who kept the inn had hysterics. Puce roared blasphemies. Quillier was doubled back over the small table, Puce on top of him, tightening his death-hold. Kerr-Anderson hit, kicked, bit, yelled.

Suddenly there were shouts from all around.

"For God's sake, quick!" sobbed Kerr-Anderson. "He's almost killed him."

"Aw, what the hell!" roared Puce.

The men in dark uniforms had all they could do to drag him away from that little, lean, blackened, unconscious thing. Then they manacled Puce. Puce looked sheepish, and grinned at Kerr-Anderson.

Two of the six men in dark uniforms helped to revive Quillier.

"Drinks," gasped Kerr-Anderson to the woman who kept the inn.

"Say, give me one," begged the gentleman from America. Huge, helpless, manacled, he stood sheepishly among his uniformed captors. Kerr-Anderson stared at them. Quillier was reviving.

"Gets like that," said the head-warder indifferently. "Gave us the slip this morning. Certain death for some one. Homicidal maniac, that's 'im! And he's the devil to hold. Been like that eleven years. Got a shock, I fancy. Keeps on talking about a sister of his called Julia who was murdered, and how he'll be revenged for it. . . ."

Kerr-Anderson had turned away. Quillier suddenly sobbed: "God have mercy on us!" The gentleman from America suddenly roared with laughter.

"Can't be helped," said the head-warder. "Sorry you were put to trouble, sir. Good-day, gentlemen. Glad it was no worse."

R. Ellis Roberts

THE NARROW WAY

from The Other End

Cecil Palmer, 1923

Permission to reprint is granted by the author

1

At his confirmation he had annoyed the Bishop of London (at that time it was Frederick Temple) by insisting on taking the additional names of Alfonso Mary Alexander. He had surprised him by the resolute manner in which he had answered his questions about the origin of taking names at confirmation; and enraged him by his explanation that he desired to be called Alexander in memory of that great Pope, the Lord Alexander VI, who had put the whole Christian world under an obligation by his discovery of the devotion of the Angelus. "This devotion," the boy murmured to the astounded Bishop, "as your Lordship no doubt knows, has been from eternity the privilege of the Holy Angels, and was not entrusted to men until the proximity of the horrible heresies of the German reformation rendered the patronage of Mary necessary for the protection of her son." The Bishop's chaplain had tried to prevent Frank Lascelles' indiscretion; but Temple's abrupt gesture had hindered his efforts. When Lascelles finished the Bishop gazed at him in silence for a minute.

"Well, I hope you'll live to grow out of this foolery. But you know your rights and you shall have 'em."

Temple was, as his old foes had discovered years before, eminently just.

More than twenty years had passed since that confirmation. Frank Alfonso Mary Alexander Lascelles had gone to Oxford and to Ely, and had been ordained to a small country parish in that diocese. After two years of his curacy, an injudicious layman presented him to the living of S. Uny and S. Petroc in

the north of Cornwall. He had been there now for over nineteen years. When he had come he found his church empty; now it was full. It was full of children and boys. Occasionally a few mothers, and, when he was sober, the village drunkard, and, when she was penitent, the prostitute from the Church Town, came to Mass as well; but generally the Church of S. Uny, down by the beach, was filled only by children and boys.

This result Frank Lascelles had been long in attaining. The parish he served was predominantly Methodist. He had found a congregation of three—the publican, the hostler of the hotel, and an old maiden lady who rang the bell, and called herself the pew opener. Lascelles soon shocked the respectability of the publican and the Protestantism of the hostler: but the old lady remained faithful to him. She did not stir when he had the three-decker cut down, and a new altar reared at the East end. She seemed to welcome the great images, Our Lady of the Immaculate Conception, The Sacred Heart, S. Joseph and S. Anthony which Lascelles put up in his church. She did not care whether he said Mass in Latin or English; and incense and holy water both left her tranquil. It was otherwise with the village. Though the Methodists never entered the church, except for a wedding or a funeral, they thought they had a right to control its services and its priest. There were stormy Easter vestries; there was a Protestant church-warden. One horrible day the fishermen broke into the church and took out the images and threw them down the cliff: by next week new ones were in their places. Lascelles was boycotted by his parishioners, except a few would-be bold spirits; and was outlawed, in the genial English way, by his Bishop; but he stuck at his job, went on saying offices to an empty church, and singing Mass to his pew opener and an occasional visitor. Then after five years or so the change began.

It was not along the usual lines of such changes. Generally priests of Lascelles' religion are eager, masculine people who soon win over the more turbulent elements in the parish, and put them, too, in search of the great adventure of Christianity. But Lascelles, though he had grown up, still remained the boy who had chosen Liguori and Alexander for his patrons. He was obsessed with the reality of the spiritual world, of good and evil. His pillow was wet with the tears he shed for the sins of his parish. He was horrified at the evil of the world, and yet constitutionally unable to defy it in any active way. He had only one strong human affection—and that was a great love for children.

At first this was not reciprocated. His odd figure, his shuffling walk, his stoop and his occasional outbursts of anger produced ridicule and fear rather than love. Then one child somehow found how large the heart of him was; and then another, and then another. He had won the children. But this would have availed him little had it not been for the arrival at S. Uny of the Rev. Paul Trengrowse. Mr. Trengrowse came to minister to the Primitives about three years after Lascelles' appointment to the parish. He was young, keen, and sincere. He had not been long in the village when the leading members of his congregation told him of the sins of the Parish Priest, and horrors of the parish church. Trengrowse prayed for light. He disliked interfering with the affairs of

an alien church; but, if half he was told was true, Lascelles must be fought. So he paid a visit to the church, which was always open, and was duly distressed at the idols he saw there.

As he was gazing at the smirking fatuity of S. Anthony, he heard a footstep. It was Lascelles who was coming from the sacristy to the altar. Fortunately, before he began Mass, Lascelles looked down the church and saw "a congregation." So he said Mass in English.

Now Trengrowse was no ordinary minister. He was a man of personal holiness, and of real devotion; and that in his spirit which was sincere and mystical recognised in the Popish-seeming priest, muttering his Mass, a kindred soul. Lascelles' absorption in his work, his grave, yet joyful solemnity, his keen sense of the other world made an immense effect on Trengrowse. The Mass proceeded, and when Trengrowse heard "Therefore with Angels and Archangels and all the Company of Heaven," he felt that he had had the answer to his prayer. This man was a Christian, however erroneous he might be in details.

So the next Sunday the Primitives, who were hoping for a strong sermon against the Scarlet Woman, were disagreeably surprised. "Mr. Lascelles may be wrong. I think he is wrong, sadly wrong, in many things: but he du love the Lord, and he du worship Him. And, brethren, no man calls Jesus Lord save by the Holy Ghost. Let us pray for Mr. Lascelles and the church people of S. Uny; and that we may all be led along the narrow way to everlasting life."

Had Trengrowse been a man of less character he might have failed in his defence of Lascelles. But he was an acceptable preacher, and a man whose plain love of his religion it was impossible to doubt. So, first with grumbling, later with a ready acquiescence, the villagers of S. Uny followed his lead.

The result was odd. Lascelles attracted the children more and more; and his services attracted them. This worried Trengrowse not a little; but when one of his congregation said scornfully, "Those bit games to the church be only fit for babes," he looked gravely at him and replied, "Ah! Eli, but the book says 'Unless ye become as little children.'" This silenced Eli, but it did not silence Trengrowse's own heart. How was it Lascelles could do anything with children, a good deal with boys up to fifteen or so, and nothing with men and women, and little with girls? Lascelles' own explanation was simple. His Bishop would not confirm his children until they were thirteen. Lascelles presented them year after year when they were six or seven. He preached an amazing sermon on the three great aids to the Devil in the parish of S. Uny—and the three heads of his sermon were: Lust, Hypocrisy and the Lord Bishop. The more respectable of the neighbouring clergy were furious, but the Bishop, who was a simple, humble-minded man (quite unlike to be the ex-head-master who had inducted Lascelles) refused to take any notice of the attack; but also refused to relax his rule about the age of confirmation candidates. The Archdeacon told Lascelles that his parish was the plague-spot of the diocese, and Lascelles retorted that in a mass of corruption any sign of health looks ominous and unusual. But, although he kept up a brave front to the disapprovers, his failure with his people galled him. He would not have minded if they had still been actively hostile. But that had long

ceased. They were now fond of their priest. They liked and shared in his notoriety. They supported him against the officials; and when a malicious Protestant from London attempted to stir up a revolt against Lascelles, he was promptly put into the harbour; and Trengrowse started a petition to the Bishop, expressing the affection "all we, whether church people or Methodists, feel for Mr. Lascelles."

Lascelles' philosophy refused to permit him to see in his failure evidences of his incapacity for his work. He had the proud humility of the perfect priest. Regarding himself as a mere channel for divine grace, he forgot that his personality was so distinctive that it affected the way in which grace reached his people. Once an old friend had tried to make him see this; but the task was hopeless.

"My dear fellow," said Lascelles, "I don't see what you mean. All they want is the Gospel. And that I give them. I say Mass for them. I will hear their confessions. I instruct them. I lead their devotions. All beside is mere human embellishment. No doubt a more competent man would be more pleasing to them, but he could do no more than give them the Gospel, could he?"

2

On All Souls' Day, 1912, Lascelles was depressed. Early that morning he had gone up to the cemetery, and said a Requiem in the little chapel. Then there had been the early Mass at 8.30 in church. The church had been full. Not only were all his children there, but there were a good many fathers and mothers: for the services on the day of the dead appealed to a deep human instinct with a power which not even Lascelles could spoil. The Dies Iræ, sung in Latin, had sounded oddly from a congregation so predominantly childish: and Lascelles had preached a short sermon on the "Significance of Death."

"We exaggerate the importance of death. It is to us death matters, not to the dead. For them it is a release, for us it is a warning. Death of the body is only a symbol. It is death of the soul we must fear. Believe me, it would be worth while for every one of you in this church to die, if by dying, you could bring a soul to Jesus. God knows, I would die for you, if that would bring you. There are those here to-day—you, Penberthy, and you, Trevose—who have not been to Mass since you were boys. Make a new resolution to-day, and ask the Holy Souls to help you keep it. Come to your duties, and return to your church."

Lascelles felt at the time that his appeal lacked force. He knew that after Mass, Penberthy would say to Trevose:

"Bootivul service, bean't it, Tom?"

"Iss—it be that. I du like it for once or twice. But for usual give me the chapel. It be more nat'ral like."

"Iss—it be. Poor Mr. Lascelles, I did think he would have a slap at us."

"Iss—it be his way. My gosh! I don't mind."

So Lascelles was depressed. He sat among his books, reading a Renascence treatise on "Death." He thought a great deal about death. Sometimes he feared it horribly. It seemed the great enemy of faith. It was so disconcerting a thing, so

heartless, so unregarding. At other times he felt defiant. But never did he reach the spirit of S. Francis about death. He was too remote from natural life and the events of animal birth and death to understand death as an ordinary thing, something not less usual than the sunset.

"It may be"—he read, "that there be more deaths than one. For it is evident that some are so hardened in sin that the death of the body comes long after the man has really been dead. Such men are commonly gay and cheerful; for with the death of their soul, has died all godly fear, all apprehension of judgment, all hope of salvation. They become but as brutes. Wherefore the church has always held that heretics, if they be obstinate and beyond recall, may be handed over to the secular arm for the death of the body. It should not trouble us that they display ordinary human virtues: for these be common in the unregenerate, and are but devices of the devil who would persuade men that religion matters naught. They are his children, and may be lawfully treated as such by any godly prince. The church herself kills not: though the Lord Pope, being a Temporal King, has the power of the sword, and may exercise the same."

Lascelles put the book down and stared at the fire. The words roused a train of thought that almost frightened him. But he was not the man to dismiss any idea because it was terrifying. He believed in giving the devil his due, and always insisted that all temptations should be met boldly, not evaded. He left his chair, and knelt at his prie-dieu, looking at the wounds of the great Crucifix which hung above it.

Half an hour later he rose with a look of resolution on his face.

3

The first case of the plague, as the villagers insisted on calling it, happened just before Epiphany. It attacked Penberthy, who had never been ill before; and in four days he was dead. His disease puzzled the doctor from the market-town, but he put it down as a curious case of infantile paralysis. His colleague from Truro, whom he consulted after the third case had occurred, insisted that the symptoms did not disclose anything more definite than shock following on *status lymphaticus*. The most serious thing was, however, not their incapacity to name, but their inability to cure the mysterious disease which was spreading in S. Uny. Except for a general weariness, a disinclination to move, and a curious "wambling in the innards," there were no definite symptoms at all to go on. After the second case they had an inquest, but it yielded no results at all, and Dr. Marlowe began to talk of getting an expert from London.

It was not until February, however, that any one came. Then by a fortunate chance Sir Joshua Tomlinson came down to S. Ives for a holiday. The "plague" at S. Uny had got into the London paper. There had been ten deaths, and two women, the first to be attacked, were lying seriously ill. Dr. Marlowe called on Sir Joshua, and the great physician said he would come over and see the patients. Marlowe was glad that the chance had sent him a great general physician rather than a surgeon or a specialist. Although he was willing to defy any specialist to

find his pet disease in the mysterious sickness that had killed the ten fishermen, he was relieved that no specialist was to be given the opportunity.

"You see, Lascelles," he said to the priest, "it's not as if we were in the fifteenth century. We may be in theology, but I'm hanged if we are in medicine. These men are dying like savages: but the savage makes up his mind he has got to die, and dies through sheer hysteria. These fellows want to live. They lust for life."

"You are right, Marlowe. Their desire for life is a lust. It is scarcely decent in a Christian to cling so to this existence. But there—it's not my business to judge. You know, Marlowe, I have sometimes thought this last month that this mysterious disease is a judgment on S. Uny. It is God's hand held out over our village. Let us pray for those who are dead, and those who are dying, and most of all, dear God, for those who are not yet to die."

Marlowe, though friendly with Lascelles, was more than a little afraid of him. The vicar had worked like two men during this distress. He had nursed the sick, he had consoled the mourners, he had said Masses and had a service of general humiliation. Somehow he had identified himself with his parish to a degree he had never reached before, and S. Uny was grateful to him. But the little doctor was rather afraid. Lascelles was strained and odd in manner. He spent too long a time in prayer, and not long enough at meals or in bed.

"No, Lascelles. I don't agree with you there. Oh! I'm a good Catholic, I hope, and I know God could intervene; but I don't see why He should."

"No: you don't see why. No one does, Marlowe, until He speaks, and then they are forced to."

On the Saturday Sir Joshua came over. He saw Mrs. Pentreath and Mrs. Whichelo, and he shook his head over both of them. He asked them questions about their diet, and about their way of living, while Marlowe stood by, silent and impatient. Then he said a few kindly, cheerful words, and left them in the big room, which the vicar had had fitted up as a hospital ward; for Marlowe thought the cases were better isolated.

"Well, sir, what do you think?"

"What sort of a man is your vicar? He seems liked."

"Yes—he is. He's an odd chap—a bit mad, I think. A very keen Catholic, and very depressed at his failure to keep the people."

"Ah! they don't go to church?"

"Well, they *do* now. They have done since this damned illness. He's been awfully good to them. And the children have always gone."

"It's a funny thing, Dr. Marlowe, that no child has been ill."

"Isn't it? That's what I say to young Jones of Truro. He will insist on his shock theory, following on *status lymphaticus*. I keep on pointing out to him that most of the patients are men who have had shocks every week of their lives since they were twelve. They'd have all been dead long since."

"Yes. I am sure Jones is wrong. But I don't know what this disease is, Dr. Marlowe. I suspect, but I don't know."

"Here is the vicar coming, Sir Joshua. Shall I introduce you?"

"Please do."

Lascelles was walking rapidly towards them. He looked ill but eager. His eyes were full of a fanatic pleasure, a kind of holy rapture that appeared to make him even taller than he actually was. He acknowledged the introduction with a bow, and would have passed on, but Sir Joshua stopped him with a question.

"You have come from your sick people, Mr. Lascelles?"

"Yes. They are no longer sick. I was just in time to hear their confessions, and give them the viaticum."

"Good God!" Sir Joshua was evidently shocked. "It's not ten minutes since we left them."

"No? The end has always been very sudden, hasn't it, Marlowe?"

"Yes. But this is quicker than usual. Do you think, Sir Joshua"—and he lowered his voice—"a post-mortem?"

"No. It would be useless. At least it would be no help to me. By the way, Marlowe, how have you entered the cause of death?"

"Well, sir—I've frankly put 'Heart failure, cause unknown.' There seemed to be nothing between that and 'Act of God.'"

"Ah! Marlowe, that's what you should have put," intervened Lascelles. "It is the hand of God—the hand of God." Then, with a bow to Sir Joshua, he hurried away.

"So your vicar thinks it is the hand of God. He may be right. God works through human agents. He is an interesting man, Dr. Marlowe."

"Yes: he is. But this trouble has worried him frightfully. I'm rather nervous for him. Have you got any theory, sir? You talked of suspicion."

"Well, Dr. Marlowe, I'll tell you what I think. Your patients have been murdered."

Marlowe looked at the great physician, as if he was afraid for his sanity.

"No, Dr. Marlowe, I'm not mad, though I have no proof of my assertion. All I ask is this, that I may be allowed to see the next patient within at least half an hour of the beginning of the illness. By the way, can they give me a bed here, do you think? Where do you put up?"

"Oh! I'm staying at the vicar's. I expect he'd be charmed to have you."

"No. I don't think I will stay with Father Lascelles. I would rather not. I'll find a room somewhere. I think there will be another case to-morrow night."

4

That Sunday morning Lascelles preached on the "Hand of Judgment." The church was packed. Trengrowse had his service at nine and brought all his congregation to the Mass at eleven. Lascelles seemed wonderfully better. His eye was clearer, his step gayer and his whole figure more buoyant. His tone as he gave out his text was exultant.

"They pierced his hands.

"The symbolism of the Divine Body is strangely arresting. The Jews thought of God as an eye watching, caring for them from heaven. We Christians watch

God—here in the Tabernacle, or in the arms of Mary. His care for us we typify by His Hand—the Hand we pierced. This last month God has been with us very wonderfully. He is always with us in the holy Sacrament; but lately He has been with us in the Sacrament of Death. His Hand of Judgment has been over, and under us; it has clasped us—and some of us it has not let go.

"Our natural feeling is one of fear. We are not used to such immediate handling as this of our God's. We have most of us tried to apply religion to our life, now we have to try and apply our life to religion. God will have us think of nothing but Him, speak to none save Him, hope for none save Him. His Hand is still with us. It will bear yet more away from S. Uny before we learn our lesson. Let me help you to learn that lesson right. Let us all take care that we renew our trust in God, that we recognise His Hand, that we answer His Love."

Sir Joshua had listened attentively to Lascelles' sermon. He seemed vaguely disappointed, and he was unwilling to discuss it with Marlowe afterwards. There was no doubt that Lascelles' almost fatalist attitude, while it annoyed the doctor, had a strange welcome from the villagers. They turned in a childlike way to the words of this man who spoke as one who knew the ways and the meaning of the Almighty. Never had Lascelles so much real devotion from his people as he secured during the "plague." It was not that they shared his feeling of complete abandonment to the Will of God; but the fact that he had such a feeling made their fate seem more tolerable.

On Sunday evening there was a new case, as Sir Joshua had expected. The disease attacked Mrs. Bodilly, the wife of the chief grocer in S. Uny. Marlowe was summoned immediately, but he found Sir Joshua already at the poor woman's bedside.

She was frankly terrified; in this her case differed from previous ones, in which the sufferers, though generally resentful, had been not the least afraid. Mrs. Bodilly had been at Mass that morning. She had got back and prepared the dinner. At tea-time she had "felt queer," but after tea she was better. Then as she was getting ready to go to the special service of Exposition, she fell down and had to be carried up to her room by her husband and sons.

She was, unlike most of the tradesmen's wives, a nominal church woman, but she had never been confirmed and rarely went to church. The fit of external piety roused in her by the "plague," was frankly based on nervous alarm. She felt that God was taking it out of S. Uny in this way; and she was anxious to escape.

Her illness found her divided between anger and fear. She was angry that her efforts to placate Divine wrath had not been more successful—she was terrified of dying, terrified still more of death as a punishment. In the most desolate way she sought reassurances from Marlowe and Sir Joshua; but neither could give her any certain consolation. The disease presented no different aspects. It indeed presented no aspect at all, except extreme weakness, astonishing slowness of the pulse, and irregular beating of the heart. Although Sir Joshua was there within five minutes of the seizure, he admitted to Marlowe that he could discover nothing of what he suspected.

"I'll be frank, Dr. Marlowe, I suspected poison. I still suspect it. I believe all these people have been poisoned in an extremely subtle way by a man so fanatical as to be almost mad. But I can find no trace of the poison. In this case, I will, if you will permit me, conduct a post-mortem, but I expect I shall fail. If I do, I must take my own line, if you wish me to help you."

"Really, Sir Joshua, you talk more like a detective than a physician."

"This is a detective's business, Dr. Marlowe. I wish it were not."

Before they left Lascelles arrived. He had been summoned by Mr. Bodilly, and he came prepared to give Mrs. Bodilly the last rites. As the boy with the light and the bell approached the stairs, Sir Joshua whispered to Marlowe:

"Your vicar seems very certain of her death."

Marlowe shrugged his shoulders. "We haven't saved a case, you know."

The post-mortem yielded no result. That evening Marlowe dined with Sir Joshua at the village inn, and after dinner the great physician told him of his suspicions. Marlowe listened at first angrily, then with an incredulous horror.

"It can't be. The man lives for his parish, I tell you. Why, he would die for it."

"Yes: I believe he would. Had I found what I looked for, he certainly would."

"But, my dear sir, there isn't a trace of any known drug. There's no trace of anything."

"No. I had expected to find—but never mind. I have a great deal of experience, Dr. Marlowe, and I am convinced that your vicar has been murdering his parishioners. And to-night I am coming to tell him so. I will walk home with you. You may be present or not, as you please."

5

Lascelles looked up a little wearily when Sir Joshua had finished speaking. "Is that all?"

Marlowe intervened.

"Look here, old man—I only came because—you'll forgive me Sir Joshua—I didn't want you to be alone under this monstrous, this fantastic accusation of Sir Joshua's. You've only got to contradict him, and we'll go."

Lascelles looked gratefully at his friend.

"Thank you, Marlowe. But Sir Joshua is right in telling me his suspicions. You have finished, Sir Joshua?"

"Yes. I should like your explanation if you have one, or your admission of my charge, and your promise that this—this—plague shall cease."

"You use strange words, sir, for a man who has no evidence for what he says."

"Yes,"—ejaculated Marlowe, "yes, by Jove, you do——"

"Please, Marlowe. You will not be content with having relieved your mind, Sir Joshua. You wish me to answer you?"

"I do. I require it."

"You know, sir, you great doctors have one failing. It is one priests have too. You cannot avoid talking to me as if I were your patient—a mental, a nervous

case. You can't help believing that your firm tone, your almost—may I say it—discourteous manner will impress me. Well, it doesn't."

Sir Joshua got red. Lascelles' words too entirely diagnosed his method. He was annoyed that he should seem so transparent to a man whom he regarded as at least half-crazy.

"I beg your pardon. There is something in what you say. Men in all professions have their—ah! tricks."

"Thank you."

Lascelles got up and stood by the fireplace looking down on his visitor. In the last month he had changed. He seemed bigger and more masculine—more as if he now had personal responsibilities: he looked less of an official, more of a man. He spoke rather slowly.

"You have accused me of murder, Sir Joshua. You ask me to admit my crime, and to promise to cease. Well, I expected your visit. I have long been familiar with your Treatise on Renascence Toxicology: it is as complete as any published book. And I am glad you and Marlowe came to-night. I have my answer ready. I admit nothing and I promise nothing."

Sir Joshua looked with a puzzled air at the priest. For a moment his accusation seemed a monstrous thing to himself. Then his common sense surged back.

"Father Lascelles, your answer does not satisfy me. I must take other steps."

"They will not lead anywhere, Sir Joshua. If *you* find no evidence, no other man can. You say my poor people were poisoned. Well, find the poison. Ah—you know you cannot. It is foolish to threaten me. But I will tell you what I had determined to tell Marlowe to-night. First, I do not expect there will be any more deaths from this plague for a long time.

"Secondly, I have a confession to make. Last All Hallows I was depressed. The work here has not gone as it should. I had the children, but not their parents. I thought much of Death and the Departed at that season of all the dead—and at last I prayed to God that if nothing else would move these people, He would send Death. Send Death mysterious and as a judgment. Death has come, and my people have learnt their lesson. All of those who died were reconciled to Holy Church before death. Of those who remain nearly all have adhered to the Church. This afternoon Mr. Trengrowse came and asked to be prepared for Confirmation—"

"Trengrowse, the minister—" cried Marlowe.

"And this evening I had notice that all who are competent intend to make their Communion next Sunday. This parish has been won for God, Sir Joshua, and at the cost of thirteen deaths. Isn't it worth it?"

"Father Lascelles, I cannot regard you as sane. You are not only practically admitting your crime, you are disclosing your motives."

"I beg your pardon, I admit nothing. I acknowledged I prayed to God to visit this people, if necessary, by His secret Death. That is not a crime. Next Sunday I shall tell my people."

"And have you *prayed* that the deaths shall cease?" asked Sir Joshua ironically.

"I was doing so when you entered," replied Lascelles quietly.

"Good God, man, your hypocrisy sickens me. You prate of God's intervention, and all the time you've been sending man after man to death by some foul poison of your own."

"Sir Joshua—do you believe God commonly works without human intervention?"

"Bah! That is sophistry."

"You condemn the machinery of justice, the compromise of war, our human evasion of rope and guillotine?"

"Surely, Marlowe," exclaimed Sir Joshua, "you can't sit and listen quietly to this damnable nonsense?"

Marlowe had been sitting dazed, looking at Lascelles as if he were fascinated. He replied in a remote voice:

"I don't know. I'm wondering"—he gave a nervous laugh—"wondering if Lascelles is a saint or a devil."

Lascelles went on imperturbably:

"You don't answer me. You can't. Why should you think I, an anointed priest, am less fit to be the door-keeper of death than Lord Justice Ommaney? At least I use no case-law. I am the slave of no precedent. I know my people. I know them individually. I love them as persons. And as persons I judge them."

The tall figure of the man seemed to glow. His face was lit with an unnatural beauty, as he stood looking down on the other two, and dared them to answer him.

Sir Joshua rose. He had lost his somewhat pompous judicial air. He was deeply, humanly moved; and he spoke with an anxiety far more impressive than his previous authoritative tone.

"Father Lascelles, I have nothing more to say. I believe you to have done a very horrible, a very wicked thing. I have heard how you would defend yourself if you were legally brought to book for such an offence. Your defence has, as you are aware, no legal force. I think it has no moral force. You are deceiving yourself strangely. One day you will have a great loneliness of heart. You will realise how terrible a responsibility you have taken. Without the sanction of society, without the approval of your church, you have decided alone, the fate of your fellow-creatures. I am sorry for you. Good-night."

The light left Lascelles' face. He looked suddenly ill and careworn. Then with a high, frantic gesture he flung his hand towards the Crucifix.

"He, too—He, too—was made sin."

Traditional

SAWNEY BEAN AND HIS FAMILY

from HISTORICAL AND TRADITIONAL TALES CONNECTED WITH THE SOUTH OF SCOTLAND

John Nicholson of Kirkcudbright, 1843

The following account, though as well attested as any historical fact can be, is almost incredible, for the monstrous and unparalleled barbarities that it relates; there being nothing that we ever heard of with the same degree of certainty, that may be compared with it, or that shews how far a brutal temper, untamed by education, and knowledge of the world, may carry a man in such glaring and horrible colours.

Sawney Bean was born in the county of East Lothian, about eight or nine miles eastward of the city of Edinburgh, in the reign of James I of Scotland. His father was a hedger and ditcher and brought up his son to the same laborious employment.

He got his daily bread in his youth by these means, but being very prone to idleness, and not caring to be confined to any honest employment, he left his father and mother, and ran away into the desert part of the country, taking with him a woman as viciously inclined as himself.

These two took up their habitation in a cave, by the sea-side on the shore of the county of Galloway; where they lived upwards of twenty-five years, without going into any city, town or village.

In this time they had a great number of children and grand-children, whom they brought up after their own manner, without any notions of humanity or civil society. They never kept any company, but among themselves, and supported themselves wholly by robbing: being, moreover, so very cruel, that they never robbed any one, whom they did not murder.

By this bloody method, and their being so retired from the world, they continued for a long time undiscovered; there being no person able to guess how the people were lost that went by the place where they lived. As soon as they had robbed any man, woman or child, they used to carry off the carcase to the den, where cutting it into quarters, they would pickle the mangled limbs, and afterward eat it; this being their own sustenance: and notwithstanding they were at last so numerous, they commonly had superfluity of this their abominable food, so that in the night-time they frequently threw legs and arms of the unhappy wretches they had murdered into the sea, at a great distance from their bloody habitation; the limbs were often cast up by the tide in several parts of the

country, to the astonishment and terror of all beholders, and others who heard of it.

Persons who had gone about their lawful occasions fell so often into their hands, that it caused a general outcry in the country round about; no person knowing what was become of their friends or relations, if they were once seen by these merciless cannibals.

All the people in the adjacent parts were at last alarmed at such an uncommon loss of their neighbours and acquaintance, for there was no travelling in safety near the den of these wretches: this occasioned spies to be frequently sent into those parts, many of whom never returned again, and those who did, after the strictest search and inquiry, could not find how these melancholy matters happened.

Several honest travellers were taken up on suspicion and wrongfully hanged upon bare circumstances: several innocent innkeepers were executed, for no other reason than that persons, who had been thus lost, were known to have lain in their houses, which occasioned a suspicion of their being murdered by them, and their bodies privately buried in obscure places to prevent a discovery. Thus an ill-placed justice was executed with the greatest severity imaginable, in order to prevent these frequent, atrocious deeds; so many innkeepers, who lived on the western road of Scotland, left off their business, for fear of being made examples of, and followed other employments.

This, on the other hand, occasioned many inconveniences to travellers, who were now in great distress for accommodation when they were disposed to refresh themselves and horses, or take up lodging for the night. In a word, the whole country was almost depopulated.

Still the king's subjects were as much missed as before, so that it became the admiration of the whole kingdom how such villainies could be carried on, and the perpetrators not discovered. A great many had been executed, not one of them all made any confession at the gallows, but maintained to the last, that they were perfectly innocent of the crime for which they suffered.

When the magistrates found all was in vain, they left off these rigorous proceedings, and trusted wholly to Providence, for the bringing to light the authors of these unparalleled barbarities when it should seem proper to the divine wisdom.

Sawney's family was at last grown very large, and every branch of it, as soon as able, assisted in perpetrating their wicked deeds, which they still followed with impunity. Sometimes they would attack four, five or six, footmen together, but never more than two, if they were on horseback; they were, moreover, so careful, that not one whom they had set upon should escape, that an ambuscade was set on every side to secure them, let them fly which way they would, provided it should ever so happen that one or more got away from the first assailants. How was it possible they should be detected, when not one that saw them ever saw any body else afterwards.

The place which they inhabited was quite solitary and lonesome, and, when the tide came up, the water went near two hundred yards into their subter-

raneous habitation, which reached almost a mile underground; so that when people who have been sent armed to search all the places about, have passed by the mouth of the cave, they have never taken any notice of it, never supposing any human being would reside in such a place of perpetual horror and darkness.

The number of people these savages destroyed was never exactly known; but it was generally computed that in the twenty-five years they continued their butcheries, they had washed their hands in the blood of at least a thousand men, women and children. The manner they were at last discovered was as follows:

A man and his wife behind him on the same horse, coming one evening home from a fair, and falling into the ambuscade of these merciless wretches, they fell upon them in a furious manner. The man, to save himself as well as he could, fought very bravely against them with sword and pistol, riding some of them down by main force of his horse.

In the conflict the poor woman fell from behind him, and was instantly butchered before her husband's face, for the female cannibals cut her throat, and fell to sucking her blood with as great a gust, as if it had been wine; this done, they ript up her belly, and pulled out all her entrails. Such a dreadful spectacle made the man make the more obstinate resistance, as he expected the same fate, if he fell into their hands.

It pleased Providence while he was engaged that twenty or thirty who had been at the same fair, came together in a body; upon which Sawney Bean and his blood-thirsty clan withdrew and made the best of their way through a thick wood to their den.

This man, who was the first who had ever fell in their way, and came off alive, told the whole company what had happened, and shewed them the horrid spectacle of his wife, whom the murderers had dragged to some distance, but had not time to carry her entirely off. They were all struck with stupefaction and amazement at what he related; they took him with them to Glasgow, and told the affair to the magistrates of that city, who immediately sent to the king concerning it.

In about three or four days after, His Majesty in person, with a body of about four hundred men, set out for the place where this dismal tragedy was acted, in order to search all the rocks and thickets, that, if possible, they might apprehend this hellish crew, which had been so long pernicious to all the western parts of the kingdom.

The man who was attacked was the guide, and care was taken to have a large number of blood-hounds with them, that no human means might be wanting towards their putting an entire end to these cruelties.

No sign of any habitation was to be found for a long time; and even when they came to the wretches' cave, they took no notice of it, but were going to pursue their search along the seashore, the tide being then out; but some of the blood-hounds luckily entered the Cimmerian den, and instantly set up a most hideous barking, howling and yelping; so that the king, with his attendants,

came back, and looked into it: they could not tell how to conceive that any thing human could be concealed in a place where they saw nothing but darkness; nevertheless, as the blood-hounds increased their noise they went farther in, and refused to come back again; they then began to imagine something or other must inhabit there. Torches were immediately sent for, and a great many men ventured in, through the most intricate turnings and windings, till at last they arrived at that private recess from all the world, which was the habitation of these monsters.

Now the whole body, or as many of them as could, went in, and were all so shocked at what they beheld, that they were almost ready to sink into the earth. Legs, arms, thighs, hands, and feet of men, women, and children, were hung up in rows, like dried beef; a great many limbs laid in pickle, and a great mass of money, both gold and silver, with watches, rings, swords, pistols and a large quantity of cloaths, both linen and woolen, and an infinite number of other things which they had taken from those they had murdered, were thrown together in heaps or hung up against the sides of the den.

Sawney's family, at this time, besides himself, consisted of his wife, eight sons, six daughters, eighteen grand-sons, and fourteen grand-daughters, who were all begotten in incest.

These were all seized and pinioned by His Majesty's order in the first place; then they took what human flesh they could find, and buried it in the sands; afterwards loading themselves with the spoils which they found, they returned to Edinburgh with their prisoners; all the country, as they passed along, flocked to see this cursed tribe. When they came to their journey's end, the wretches were committed to the Tolbooth, from whence they were the next day conducted, under a strong guard, to Leith, where they were executed without any process, it being thought needless to try creatures who were even professed enemies to mankind.

The men were dismembered, their hands and legs were severed from their bodies, by which amputation they bled to death in a few hours. The wife, daughters, and grand-children, having been made spectators of this just punishment inflicted on the men, were afterwards burnt to death in three several fires. They all in general died without the least signs of repentance, but continued cursing and vending the most dreadful imprecations to the very last gasp of life.

Bram Stoker

THE SQUAW

from Dracula's Guest

Routledge, 1914

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Nurnberg at the time was not so much exploited as it has been since then. Irving had not been playing *Faust*, and the very name of the old town was hardly known to the great bulk of the travelling public. My wife and I being in the second week of our honeymoon, naturally wanted someone else to join our party, so that when the cheery stranger, Elias P. Hutcheson, hailing from Isthmian City, Bleeding Gulch, Maple Tree County, Neb., turned up at the station at Frankfort, and casually remarked that he was going on to see the most all-fired old Methuselah of a town in Yurrup, and that he guessed that so much travelling alone was enough to send an intelligent, active citizen into the melancholy ward of a daft house, we took the pretty broad hint and suggested that we should join forces. We found, on comparing notes afterwards, that we had each intended to speak with some diffidence or hesitation so as not to appear too eager, such not being a good compliment to the success of our married life; but the effect was entirely marred by our both beginning to speak at the same instant—stopping simultaneously and then going on together again. Anyhow, no matter how, it was done; and Elias P. Hutcheson became one of our party. Straightway Amelia and I found the pleasant benefit; instead of quarrelling, as we had been doing, we found that the restraining influence of a third party was such that we now took every opportunity of spooning in odd corners. Amelia declares that ever since she has, as the result of that experience, advised all her friends to take a friend on the honeymoon. Well, we "did" Nurnberg together, and much enjoyed the racy remarks of our Transatlantic friend, who, from his quaint speech and his wonderful stock of adventures, might have stepped out of a novel. We kept for the last object of interest in the city to be visited the Burg, and on the day appointed for the visit strolled round the outer wall of the city by the eastern side.

The Burg is seated on a rock dominating the town, and an immensely deep fosse guards it on the northern side. Nurnberg has been happy in that it was never sacked; had it been it would certainly not be so spick and span perfect as it is at present. The ditch has not been used for centuries, and now its base is spread with tea-gardens and orchards, of which some of the trees are of quite

respectable growth. As we wandered round the wall, dawdling in the hot July sunshine, we often paused to admire the views spread before us, and in especial the great plain covered with towns and villages and bounded with a blue line of hills, like a landscape of Claude Lorraine. From this we always turned with new delight to the city itself, with its myriad of quaint old gables and acre-wide red roofs dotted with dormer windows, tier upon tier. A little to our right rose the towers of the Burg, and nearer still, standing grim, the Torture Tower, which was, and is, perhaps, the most interesting place in the city. For centuries the tradition of the Iron Virgin of Nurnberg has been handed down as an instance of the horrors of cruelty of which man is capable; we had long looked forward to seeing it; and here at last was its home.

In one of our pauses we leaned over the wall of the moat and looked down. The garden seemed quite fifty or sixty feet below us, and the sun pouring into it with an intense, moveless heat like that of an oven. Beyond rose the grey, grim wall seemingly of endless height, and losing itself right and left in the angles of bastion and counterscarp. Trees and bushes crowned the wall, and above again towered the lofty houses on whose massive beauty Time has only set the hand of approval. The sun was hot and we were lazy; time was our own, and we lingered, leaning on the wall. Just below us was a pretty sight—a great black cat lying stretched in the sun, whilst round her gambolled prettily a tiny black kitten. The mother would wave her tail for the kitten to play with, or would raise her feet and push away the little one as an encouragement to further play. They were just at the foot of the wall, and Elias P. Hutcheson, in order to help the play, stopped and took from the walk a moderate sized pebble.

"See!" he said, "I will drop it near the kitten, and they will both wonder where it came from."

"Oh, be careful," said my wife; "you might hit the dear little thing!"

"Not me, ma'am," said Elias P. "Why, I'm as tender as a Maine cherry-tree. Lor, bless ye, I wouldn't hurt the poor pooty little critter more'n I'd scalp a baby. An' you may bet your variegated socks on that! See, I'll drop it fur away on the outside so's not to go near her!" Thus saying, he leaned over and held his arm out at full length and dropped the stone. It may be that there is some attractive force which draws lesser matters to greater; or more probably that the wall was not plumb but sloped to its base—we not noticing the inclination from above; but the stone fell with a sickening thud that came up to us through the hot air, right on the kitten's head, and shattered out its little brains then and there. The black cat cast a swift upward glance, and we saw her eyes like green fire fixed an instant on Elias P. Hutcheson; and then her attention was given to the kitten, which lay still with just a quiver of her tiny limbs, whilst a thin red stream trickled from a gaping wound. With a muffled cry, such as a human being might give, she bent over the kitten, licking its wound and moaning. Suddenly she seemed to realise that it was dead, and again threw her eyes up at us. I shall never forget the sight, for she looked the perfect incarnation of hate. Her green eyes blazed with lurid fire, and the white, sharp teeth seemed to almost shine through the blood which dabbled her mouth and whiskers. She gnashed her

teeth, and her claws stood out stark and at full length on every paw. Then she made a wild rush up the wall as if to reach us, but when the momentum ended fell back, and further added to her horrible appearance for she fell on the kitten, and rose with her back fur smeared with its brains and blood. Amelia turned quite faint, and I had to lift her back from the wall. There was a seat close by in shade of a spreading plane-tree, and here I placed her whilst she composed herself. Then I went back to Hutcheson, who stood without moving, looking down on the angry cat below.

As I joined him, he said:

"Wall, I guess that air the savagest beast I ever see—'cept once when an Apache squaw had an edge on a half-breed what they nicknamed 'Splinters' 'cos of the way he fixed up her papoose which he stole on a raid just to show that he appreciated the way they had given his mother the fire torture. She got that kinder look so set on her face that it just seemed to grow there. She followed Splinters more'n three year till at last the braves got him and handed him over to her. They did say that no man, white or Injun, had ever been so long a-dying under the tortures of the Apaches. The only time I ever see her smile was when I wiped her out. I kem on the camp just in time to see Splinters pass in his checks, and he wasn't sorry to go either. He was a hard citizen, and though I never could shake with him after that papoose business—for it was bitter bad, and he should have been a white man, for he looked like one—I see he had got paid out in full. Durn me, but I took a piece of his hide from one of his skinnin posts an' had it made into a pocket-book. It's here now!" and he slapped the breast pocket of his coat.

Whilst he was speaking the cat was continuing her frantic efforts to get up the wall. She would take a run back and then charge up, sometimes reaching an incredible height. She did not seem to mind the heavy fall which she got each time but started with renewed vigour; and at every tumble her appearance became more horrible. Hutcheson was a kind-hearted man—my wife and I had both noticed little acts of kindness to animals as well as to persons—and he seemed concerned at the state of fury to which the cat had wrought herself.

"Wall now!" he said, "I du declare that that poor critter seems quite desperate. There! there! poor thing, it was all an accident—though that won't bring back your little one to you. Say! I wouldn't have had such a thing happen for a thousand! Just shows what a clumsy fool of a man can do when he tries to play! Seems I'm too darned slipperhanded to even play with a cat. Say Colonel!"—it was a pleasant way he had to bestow titles freely—"I hope your wife don't hold no grudge against me on account of this unpleasantness? Why, I wouldn't have had it occur on no account."

He came over to Amelia and apologised profusely, and she with her usual kindness of heart hastened to assure him that she quite understood that it was an accident. Then we all went again to the wall and looked over.

The cat missing Hutcheson's face had drawn back across the moat, and was sitting on her haunches as though ready to spring. Indeed, the very instant she saw him she did spring, and with a blind unreasoning fury, which would have

been grotesque, only that it was so frightfully real. She did not try to run up the wall, but simply launched herself at him as though hate and fury could lend her wings to pass straight through the great distance between them. Amelia, womanlike, got quite concerned, and said to Elias P. in a warning voice:

"Oh! you must be very careful. That animal would try to kill you if she were here; her eyes look like positive murder."

He laughed out jovially. "Excuse me, ma'am," he said, "but I can't help laughin'. Fancy a man that has fought grizzlies an' Injuns bein' careful of bein' murdered by a cat!"

When the cat heard him laugh, her whole demeanour seemed to change. She no longer tried to jump or run up the wall, but went quietly over, and sitting again beside the dead kitten began to lick and fondle it as though it were alive.

"See!" said I, "the effect of a really strong man. Even that animal in the midst of her fury recognises the voice of a master, and bows to him!"

"Like a squaw!" was the only comment of Elias P. Hutcheson, as we moved on our way round the city fosse. Every now and then we looked over the wall and each time saw the cat following us. At first she had kept going back to the dead kitten, and then as the distance grew greater took it in her mouth and so followed. After a while, however, she abandoned this, for we saw her following all alone; she had evidently hidden the body somewhere. Amelia's alarm grew at the cat's persistence, and more than once she repeated her warning; but the American always laughed with amusement, till finally, seeing that she was beginning to be worried, he said:

"I say, ma'am, you needn't be skeered over that cat. I go heeled, I du!" Here he slapped his pistol pocket at the back of his lumbar region. "Why sooner'n have you worried, I'll shoot the critter, right here, an' risk the police interferin' with a citizen of the United States for carryin' arms contrairy to reg'lations!" As he spoke he looked over the wall, but the cat, on seeing him, retreated, with a growl, into a bed of tall flowers, and was hidden. He went on: "Blest if that ar critter ain't got more sense of what's good for her than most Christians. I guess we've seen the last of her! You bet, she'll go back now to that busted kitten and have a private funeral of it, all to herself!"

Amelia did not like to say more, lest he might, in mistaken kindness to her, fulfil his threat of shooting the cat: and so we went on and crossed the little wooden bridge leading to the gateway whence ran the steep paved roadway between the Burg and the pentagonal Torture Tower. As we crossed the bridge we saw the cat again down below us. When she saw us her fury seemed to return, and she made frantic efforts to get up the steep wall. Hutcheson laughed as he looked down at her, and said:

"Good-bye, old girl. Sorry I in-jured your feelin's, but you'll get over it in time! So long!" And then we passed through the long, dim archway and came to the gate of the Burg.

When we came out again after our survey of this most beautiful old place which not even the well-intended efforts of the Gothic restorers of forty years ago have been able to spoil—though their restoration was then glaring white—we

seemed to have quite forgotten the unpleasant episode of the morning. The old lime tree with its great trunk gnarled with the passing of nearly nine centuries, the deep well cut through the heart of the rock by those captives of old, and the lovely view from the city wall whence we heard, spread over almost a full quarter of an hour, the multitudinous chimes of the city, had all helped to wipe out from our minds the incident of the slain kitten.

We were the only visitors who had entered the Torture Tower that morning—so at least said the old custodian—and as we had the place all to ourselves were able to make a minute and more satisfactory survey than would have otherwise been possible. The custodian, looking to us as the sole source of his gains for the day, was willing to meet our wishes in any way. The Torture Tower is truly a grim place, even now when many thousands of visitors have sent a stream of life, and the joy that follows life, into the place; but at the time I mention it wore its grimmest and most gruesome aspect. The dust of ages seemed to have settled on it, and the darkness and the horror of its memories seem to have become sentient in a way that would have satisfied the Pantheistic souls of Philo or Spinoza. The lower chamber where we entered was seemingly, in its normal state, filled with incarnate darkness; even the hot sunlight streaming in through the door seemed to be lost in the vast thickness of the walls, and only showed the masonry rough as when the builder's scaffolding had come down, but coated with dust and marked here and there with patches of dark stain which, if walls could speak, could have given their own dread memories of fear and pain. We were glad to pass up the dusty wooden staircase, the custodian leaving the outer door open to light us somewhat on our way; for to our eyes the one long-wick'd, evil-smelling candle stuck in a sconce on the wall gave an inadequate light. When we came up through the open trap in the corner of the chamber overhead, Amelia held on to me so tightly that I could actually feel her heart beat. I must say for my own part that I was not surprised at her fear, for this room was even more gruesome than that below. Here there was certainly more light, but only just sufficient to realise the horrible surroundings of the place. The builders of the tower had evidently intended that only they who should gain the top should have any of the joys of light and prospect. There, as we had noticed from below, were ranges of windows, albeit of mediæval smallness, but elsewhere in the tower were only a very few narrow slits such as were habitual in places of mediæval defence. A few of these only lit the chamber, and these so high up in the wall that from no part could the sky be seen through the thickness of the walls. In racks, and leaning in disorder against the walls, were a number of headsmen's swords, great double-handed weapons with broad blade and keen edge. Hard by were several blocks whereon the necks of the victims had lain, with here and there deep notches where the steel had bitten through the guard of flesh and shored into the wood. Round the chamber, placed in all sorts of irregular ways, were many implements of torture which made one's heart ache to see—chairs full of spikes which gave instant and excruciating pain; chairs and couches with dull knobs whose torture was seemingly less, but which, though slower, were equally efficacious; racks, belts, boots, gloves, collars, all made for compressing at will;

steel baskets in which the head could be slowly crushed into a pulp if necessary; watchmen's hooks with long handle and knife that cut at resistance—this a specialty of the old Nurnberg police system; and many, many other devices for man's injury to man. Amelia grew quite pale with the horror of the things, but fortunately did not faint, for being a little overcome she sat down on a torture chair, but jumped up again with a shriek, all tendency to faint gone. We both pretended that it was the injury done to her dress by the dust of the chair, and the rusty spikes which had upset her, and Mr. Hutcheson acquiesced in accepting the explanation with a kind-hearted laugh.

But the central object in the whole of this chamber of horrors was the engine known as the Iron Virgin, which stood near the centre of the room. It was a rudely-shaped figure of a woman, something of the bell order, or, to make a closer comparison, of the figure of Mrs. Noah in the children's Ark, but without that slimness of waist and perfect *rondeur* of hip which marks the æsthetic type of the Noah family. One would hardly have recognised it as intended for a human figure at all had not the founder shaped on the forehead a rude semblance of a woman's face. This machine was coated with rust without, and covered with dust; a rope was fastened to a ring in the front of the figure, about where the waist should have been, and was drawn through a pulley, fastened on the wooden pillar which sustained the flooring above. The custodian pulling this rope showed that a section of the front was hinged like a door at one side; we then saw that the engine was of considerable thickness, leaving just room enough inside for a man to be placed. The door was of equal thickness and of great weight, for it took the custodian all his strength, aided though he was by the contrivance of the pulley, to open it. This weight was partly due to the fact that the door was of manifest purpose hung so as to throw its weight downwards, so that it might shut of its own accord when the strain was released. The inside was honeycombed with rust—nay more, the rust alone that comes through time would hardly have eaten so deep into the iron walls; the rust of the cruel stains was deep indeed! It was only, however, when we came to look at the inside of the door that the diabolical intention was manifest to the full. Here were several long spikes, square and massive, broad at the base and sharp at the points, placed in such a position that when the door should close the upper ones would pierce the eyes of the victim, and the lower ones his heart and vitals. The sight was too much for poor Amelia, and this time she fainted dead off, and I had to carry her down the stairs, and place her on a bench outside till she recovered. That she felt it to the quick was afterwards shown by the fact that my eldest son bears to this day a rude birthmark on his breast, which has, by family consent, been accepted as representing the Nurnberg Virgin.

When we got back to the chamber we found Hutcheson still opposite the Iron Virgin; he had been evidently philosophising, and now gave us the benefit of his thought in the shape of a sort of exordium.

"Wall, I guess I've been learnin' somethin' here while madam has been gettin' over her faint. 'Pears to me that we're a long way behind the times on our side of the big drink. We uster think out on the plains that the Injun could give

us points in tryin' to make a man oncomfortable; but I guess your old mediæval law-and-order party could raise him every time. Splinters was pretty good in his bluff on the squaw, but this here young miss held a straight flush all high on him. The points of them spikes air sharp enough still, though even the edges air eaten out by what uster be on them. It'd be a good thing for our Indian section to get some specimens of this here play-toy to send round to the Reservations jest to knock the stuffin' out of the bucks, and the squaws too, by showing them as how old civilisation lays over them at their best. Guess but I'll get in that box a minute jest to see how it feels!"

"Oh no! no!" said Amelia. "It is too terrible!"

"Guess, ma'am, nothin's too terrible to the explorin' mind. I've been in some queer places in my time. Spent a night inside a dead horse while a prairie fire swept over me in Montana Territory—an' another time slept inside a dead buffler when the Comanches was on the war path an' I didn't keer to leave my kyard on them. I've been two days in a caved-in tunnel in the Billy Broncho gold mine in New Mexico, an' was one of the four shut up for three parts of a day in the caisson what slid over on her side when we was settin' the foundations of the Buffalo Bridge. I've not funked an odd experience yet, an' I don't propose to begin now!"

We saw that he was set on the experiment, so I said: "Well, hurry up, old man, and get through it quick!"

"All right, General," said he, "but I calculate we ain't quite ready yet. The gentlemen, my predecessors, what stood in that thar canister, didn't volunteer for the office—not much! And I guess there was some ornamental tyin' up before the big stroke was made. I want to go into this thing fair and square, so I must get fixed up proper first. I dare say this old galoot can rise some string and tie me up accordin' to sample?"

This was said interrogatively to the old custodian, but the latter, who understood the drift of his speech, though perhaps not appreciating to the full the niceties of dialect and imagery, shook his head. His protest was, however, only formal and made to be overcome. The American thrust a gold piece into his hand, saying, "Take it, pard! it's your pot; and don't be skeer'd. This ain't no necktie party that you're asked to assist in!" He produced some thin frayed rope and proceeded to bind our companion, with sufficient strictness for the purpose. When the upper part of his body was bound, Hutcheson said:

"Hold on a moment, Judge. Guess I'm too heavy for you to tote into the canister. You jest let me walk in, and then you can wash up regardin' my legs!"

Whilst speaking he had backed himself into the opening which was just enough to hold him. It was a close fit and no mistake. Amelia looked on with fear in her eyes, but she evidently did not like to say anything. Then the custodian completed his task by tying the American's feet together so that he was now absolutely helpless and fixed in his voluntary prison. He seemed to really enjoy it, and the incipient smile which was habitual to his face blossomed into actuality as he said:

"Guess this here Eve was made out of the rib of a dwarf! There ain't much

room for a full-grown citizen of the United States to hustle. We uster make our coffins more roomier in Idaho territory. Now, Judge, you just begin to let this door down, slow, on to me. I want to feel the same pleasure as the other jays had when those spikes began to move toward their eyes!"

"Oh no! no! no!" broke in Amelia hysterically. "It is too terrible! I can't bear to see it!—I can't! I can't!"

But the American was obdurate. "Say, Colonel," said he, "why not take madam for a little promenade? I wouldn't hurt her feelin's for the world; but now that I am here, havin' kem eight thousand miles, wouldn't it be too hard to give up the very experience I've been pinin' and pantin' fur? A man can't get to feel like canned goods every time! Me and the Judge here'll fix up this thing in no time, an' then you'll come back, an' we'll all laugh together!"

Once more the resolution that is born of curiosity triumphed, and Amelia stayed holding tight to my arm and shivering whilst the custodian began to slacken slowly inch by inch the rope that held back the iron door. Hutcheson's face was positively radiant as his eyes followed the first movement of the spikes.

"Wall!" he said. "I guess I've not had enjoyment like this since I left Noo York. Bar a scrap with a French sailor at Wapping—an' that warn't much of a picnic neither—I've not had a show fur real pleasure in this dod-rotted Continent, where there ain't no b'ars nor no Injuns, an' where nary man goes heeled. Slow there, Judge! Don't you rush this business! I want a show for my money this game—I du!"

The custodian must have had in him some of the blood of his predecessors in that ghastly tower, for he worked the engine with a deliberate and excruciating slowness which after five minutes, in which the outer edge of the door had not moved half as many inches, began to overcome Amelia. I saw her lips whiten, and felt her hold upon my arm relax. I looked around an instant for a place whereon to lay her, and when I looked at her again found that her eye had become fixed on the side of the Virgin. Following its direction I saw the black cat crouching out of sight. Her green eyes shone like danger lamps in the gloom of the place, and their colour was heightened by the blood which still smeared her coat and reddened her mouth. I cried out:

"The cat! look out for the cat!" for even then she sprang out before the engine. At this moment she looked like a triumphant demon. Her eyes blazed with ferocity, her hair bristled out till she seemed twice her normal size, and her tail lashed about as does a tiger's when the quarry is before it. Elias P. Hutcheson when he saw her was amused, and his eyes positively sparkled with fun as he said:

"Darned if the squaw hain't got on all her war paint! Jest give her a shove off if she comes any of her tricks on me, for I'm so fixed everlastingly by the boss, that durn my skin if I can keep my eyes from her if she wants them! Easy there, Judge! Don't you slack that ar rope or I'm euchered!"

At this moment Amelia completed her faint, and I had to clutch hold of her round the waist or she would have fallen to the floor. Whilst attending to her

I saw the black cat crouching for a spring, and jumped up to turn the creature out.

But at that instant, with a sort of hellish scream, she hurled herself, not as we expected at Hutcheson, but straight at the face of the custodian. Her claws seemed to be tearing wildly as one sees in the Chinese drawings of the dragon rampant, and as I looked I saw one of them light on the poor man's eye, and actually tear through it and down his cheek, leaving a wide band of red where the blood seemed to spurt from every vein.

With a yell of sheer terror which came quicker than even his sense of pain, the man leaped back, dropping as he did so the rope which held back the iron door. I jumped for it, but was too late, for the cord ran like lightning through the pulley-block, and the heavy mass fell forward from its own weight.

As the door closed I caught a glimpse of our poor companion's face. He seemed frozen with terror. His eyes stared with a horrible anguish as if dazed, and no sound came from his lips.

And then the spikes did their work. Happily the end was quick, for when I wrenched open the door they had pierced so deep that they had locked in the bones of the skull through which they had crushed, and actually tore him—it—out of his iron prison till, bound as he was, he fell at full length with a sickly thud upon the floor, the face turning upward as he fell.

I rushed to my wife, lifted her up and carried her out, for I feared for her very reason if she should wake from her faint to such a scene. I laid her on the bench outside and ran back. Leaning against the wooden column was the custodian moaning in pain whilst he held his reddening handkerchief to his eyes. And sitting on the head of the poor American was the cat, purring loudly as she licked the blood which trickled through the gashed sockets of his eyes.

I think no one will call me cruel because I seized one of the old executioner's swords and shore her in two as she sat.

Violet Hunt

THE CORSICAN SISTERS

from More Tales of the Uneasy

Heinemann, 1925

Permission to reprint is granted by the author

The young widow of Cecil Anthony De La Garde went mad through circumstances connected with her honeymoon. The murderer, pleading the custom of the country, the incitements of his relatives and his great age, died in prison.

Lelis De La Garde knew nothing of this. Until her son, born posthumously, was old enough to take charge of her she dreamed of revenge, and keeping her husband's bloodstained shirt hanging on a nail over the head of her bed, would often point upwards to the ceiling and cower down as if she was afraid of being shot, repeating the word "Vendetta" and, sometimes—"I killed him."

It was true that she had insisted on choosing for the honeymoon a place where his death awaited him since 1859. The notion of going to Corsica had come to her in Paris. Lelis Cranmer had been sent to school there by her sister Emmeline, to distract her if possible from a girlish passion for her clever, handsome, but elderly cousin Cecil. There was a tall, high-cheekboned, gipsy-looking fellow who swept the corridors in the Maison de Famille in the Rue de Caumartin whom she thought she would get to pose for her; Madame had said that he came from *le pays du Vendetta,* and, indeed, he looked exactly like a bandit and flourished his broom with a cloth wrapped round it as if it had been a gun. Lelis knew that a Corsican cherishes his gun, makes a pet of it, calls it endearing names and puts it under the protection of the Virgin. . . . *Cane Canisti, Putra Ascendisti, Ó Christú Offendisti.* A few words of patois and the sardonic man became friendly and told her all about himself and that he came from Ghisone under Vizza-Vona. She knew where Vizza-Vona was and asked him if he knew Vivario, where her mother had been once. Gatti di Vivario? He had heard of it. It was a few miles away *du coté de Bocognano.*

She had learned all the technicalities of Vendetta and the slight but honourable difference between a Corsican bandit and a Sicilian brigand when she was quite small, also French and a few words of patois from two young ladies whom Uncle Horace had persuaded her mother to bring back with her to London, which they had set on fire with their beauty, as Sir Frederick Barton and Uncle Horace had predicted they would do. This act of brigandage was the romance of Lelis Cranmer's childhood and of her girlhood too, for it was connected with the rich Uncle who was Cecil's father (and so like him).

Uncle Horace was dead now but she remembered still his fatal fascination and the way he always made people, including Mamma, do what he wanted. His money helped; he was a millionaire and the *Argentina* weighed four hundred tons. Mamma, young, romantic, a slave to her elder brother, had sent her children to Aunt Mary Nottingham's for the winter so as to be free to play hostess for him on one of his Mediterranean trips. Papa, a landscape painter, had of course gone too, and Sir Frederick Barton, the figure painter and critic, made a fourth. Papa had persuaded them to take Corsica on their way home from Greece, to the disgust of Sir Frederick Barton, who only cared for picture galleries, not Nature, and pleaded to be kept no more than a couple of days in the aridities of Corsica. He had since been made a Director of the National Gallery.

The three children—Emmeline, fifteen; Isabelle, ten, and Lelis, five—had been brought back in the Spring as soon as the London house was opened again. They found their mother in the nursery, kind, tender, weeping for joy, and hovering about, two young ladies with chignons of goldy-brown hair piled at the back of their heads, wearing brown silk dresses flounced to the waist as good as Mamma's,

gold earrings and watch-chains to which gold watches, tucked into their tight waistbands, were attached. They had beautiful faces but discontented expressions and, though kind, did not seem very fond of children. But they had brought a doll named Argentina, after Uncle Horace's yacht, from Paris, dressed all through like a real little girl, not a lady like the other stupid kind, for Isabelle; while for Emmeline it was something to wear, a sort of brooch-thing made like an umbrella with a coral stick, and on one side of the umbrella part was written *Vendetta* and on the other *À la Morte*. This, they said, was a charm. Lelis was too much of a baby to care for anything but sweets.

Next day a nice old French gentleman, with a frilled shirt and a sort of gold, single spectacle called a monocle, whom the children were bidden to call Monsieur le Marquis and who was the godfather of Madeleine in French and Matalina in Corsican, just as Chilina, or Chili for short, was really Micheline, came over from Paris and stayed a whole week in Lancaster Gate.

He brought the children more things from Paris, *bonbonnières* and hats, and took them all drives in the Park and to Richmond and to see the decorations for the Prince's marriage. He and the girls called Mrs. Cranmer "Madame Marguerite," and the children were sorry when he went, although the hats which they had to wear all the time he was there were a misery and would not stay on.

For about a month after their return from Aunt Mary's, Uncle Horace, whom the girls and Mamma had taken to calling 'Ora—Corsican for Horace—came every day and seemed very fond and proud of Chili and Matalina. Chili and Matalina went away with them to Whitby for the summer and to Brighton for the winter, where Mamma took a house on Isabelle's account, for she was delicate. And, just about the twentieth of December, Lelis's birthday—she was six—and Matalina's birthday falling about the same time, Uncle Horace came down from London with Lord Ivo in his four-in-hand and put up at the hotel, and the two men came and had dinner (which was their tea) in Powys Square. Uncle Horace brought Lelis a doll's dinner service in blue china and real glass glasses, and the children were allowed to make soup in the *soupière* with what Chili, who was learning English as quick as she could to be able to talk to Uncle Horace, called "a little deleau," and crumbled biscuits and orange juice into it, and there were great fat crackers like bolsters which Matalina and Chili did not like and screamed when they went off and fell into the nearest person's arms, though they bore it for the sake of the beautiful big presents that came out of them. Uncle Horace and Lord Ivo always arranged to keep the stick end, as if Matalina and Chili were babies. When Uncle Horace found a ring in one he at once put it on Chili's finger, saying some words like a clergyman, and then he kissed her and Mamma scolded him, for Chili was not a child but *une jeune fille comme il faut*, and she made Chili take it off at once. But after Uncle Horace had gone up to town again she wore the ring on her third finger for a whole week, although Mamma told her not. When Isabelle asked her if it was real diamonds, she said yes, and that *c'était son anneau de fiançailles*. She soon lost it to please Mamma, and Lelis supposed Uncle Horace would give her a new one and a bet-

ter one, for he seemed to like her the best, while Lord Ivo liked Matalina because of her lovely pink cheeks.

The girls were both very fond of Mamma and Papa, who didn't interfere with them much but left it all to Mamma. And Mamma had got very fond of them, though she sometimes told Emmeline that she did not quite like their characters. They were, she said—and Uncle Horace had partly agreed with her—beautiful savages with a veneer of French manners and thought murder a far more venial sin than omitting to go to confession regularly, and didn't even do that. Chilina had said, when Mamma tried to make her see that bandits after all were wicked men who were outlawed because they had taken life: "*Bah! Qui ne tue pas quelque fois?*" Chilina was thin and more bloodthirsty than Matalina, who was fattish and cared for her dinner and was far severer as a governess. Once Mamma did think she had detected some sign of feeling in Matalina when she said that the blackbirds in her country were *magnifiques!* Mamma said, "How? Size or song?" and Matalina told her that they fed them on myrtle seeds and arbutus berries, which made them very good, and that thousands of pots were sent every year to Marseilles.

Mamma took Chili and Matalina to parties with her nearly every night, and all three used to come into the children's nursery just before the cab came, to show their dresses. The lessons went on all the same, but the morning after the party both Matalina and Chili seemed rather tired out with being up late and went into such tempers! As the children got more used to their young governesses they began to tease them and play tricks on them, hiding their false hair and jumping out on them suddenly from behind doors, and Mamma, of course, scolded them, but Matalina and Chili thought not half enough. And at Whitby, that second year they were in England, they took to bolting upstairs and barricading themselves into their rooms. Papa, who was an Oxford man, would say softly to Mamma: "Aspiritas Corsicorum!" The end of it was that, in the winter, the children were sent to school and Monsieur de St. Brice appeared again, as polite as ever, and took them home. Their Mamma, he said, was failing and *avait besoin de leur soins*. The sisters had cried and cried and thrown themselves on the neck of Madame Marguerite, who had cried too, but she really could not keep them. They expected so much and were so short-tempered and gave so much trouble, putting the servants out by lying in bed in the mornings, eating *pralines*, stickying the sheets and leaving their clothes all over the room, and did not do much teaching.

So she gave them each a good sealskin jacket, and all the painters who had painted them gave them little sketches as souvenirs and they had to go. Mamma saw them off to Dover, and Papa—actually Papa—brought the children to the station. Uncle Horace did not go. He was away on his wedding tour. But his only son, Cecil, who was grown up and cross at being given a stepmother, came, and their mother invited him back to stop with them at Lancaster Gate, where Lelis attached herself to him and liked to sit on the arm of his chair while he was reading.

From Vivario the girls had written beautiful letters to their dear Madame

Marguerite and sent her pictures of Vivario where they declared themselves *ennuyées à mourir*. Also copies of *Voceri* and words of charms which they said they had had to wait for till Christmas Eve—since no one would recite them at any other time—how to call up the spirits and make your gun efficacious. Mamma was always very much interested in the superstitions and ways of foreigners.

Then, five years later, the mother of the girls died, and large envelopes with inch-wide margins of black as if, Mamma said, the whole River of Styx had overflowed and left a sediment, came, informing Madame Marguerite Cranmer of *la perte cruelle* that about a hundred and twenty persons, all enumerated, had come to make in Madame Veuve Maymart and desiring the prayers of Madame Marguerite for the departed. Her two daughters, of course, headed the list, followed by *beaux pères* and *belles mères* and brothers and brothers-in-law and cousins and even Uncles German.

Two years later more rivers of black, but the name of Micheline Maymart was not in the list but all by itself on the top, where her mother had been before. It did not say what she had died of, but Mamma said it was a kind of decline and that she must have died unmarried, for her name was still Maymart. Soon after Micheline's death Matalina, supposed to be very old at thirty, determined not to *coiffer Sainte Catherine*, as she said, married an individual called Andrea Bonelli, who belonged to the famous bandit family of the Bella Coscie, with whom the mistress of the inn had always maintained the most friendly relations. This particular Bonelli *avait bien eu du tracas avec le gouvernement*. . . . Some murders. . . . He was now, however, honoured and respected and had been made Mayor of his native place. He had compounded of course, Mamma said, with the powers that be and adroitly placed presents now and again. Mamma had been given to understand that it was really Chilina he had wanted if she hadn't died. She had been on the point of taking him, out of sheer boredom, just before she came to England, but it was not a good marriage—naturally. He was not Mayor of Vivario then, but still *alla campagna*, and her mother had hoped that the trip *l'en distrairerait un peu*.

Lelis, interested in everything that concerned Cecil and his father, after Mamma had died had no one to ask about these things but Emmeline. Emmeline kept house and settled everything and chose to send Lelis off to school after she was grown up so that she might forget Cecil, who, Emmeline considered, was too old for her since he was now well over thirty and Lelis only nineteen. It was hoped that absence might have its effect on both; Cecil might propose and Lelis have strength to refuse him. But before she left Lelis jolly well made Emmeline tell her all she knew about the two Princesses in the Hovel.

Well, Emmeline had said, pleased with Lelis for consenting to go to Paris, well, Uncle Horace was dead and his wife too, but Emmeline did not think Uncle Horace had behaved very well about it! Emmeline wasn't at all sure from what she had heard Mamma say that it wasn't imputed to *him* that Micheline Maymart had died of a broken heart. Uncle Horace had certainly encouraged her to think and her people to think he took a special interest in her. He never took

the slightest interest in Matalina. And Cecil—she was careful to rub this in—was cold and heartless like his father! Then she proceeded to tell her little sister all their mother had told her and that she had picked up from the servants at the time when she was a sharp and noticing young person of fifteen.

Papa and Mamma, after they had been all the winter cruising about, had persuaded Uncle Horace to take them on to Corsica. Papa wanted to get a sketch of Corte, the citadel on the rock, and of course Mamma always played up to him. She could do nearly everything with Uncle Horace except prevent him smoking himself to death, which he did in the end. So they sailed to Ajaccio and put up at the very good hotel there, and, a few days later, took a carriage to drive to Corte—it was the only way you could go—there were no railways then. Papa stopped at Corte ensnared by a view, and the others went on to a place called Vivario, where there was supposed to be a goodish inn that Edward Lear, one of Mamma's friends, had told her of. The roads, Mamma said, were beautiful, all bordered by a kind of scrub they call the *maquis*—or *macchia* in Italian. Fancy, Emmeline said, all white heather growing as high as a child and men hiding in it who had murdered other men for the sake of revenge, and so had to fly from the police who looked for them and never found them, for the local people were in league with these creatures and told them whenever the police were coming, because they had only carried out the practice of the country to avenge a murderer who was avenging a murder before, and so it went on for ever. They grew quite rich and had cows and vineyards and carried orange-coloured gourds for water at the sides of their belts, like the one Mamma brought home that hung by the right-hand corner of the mantelpiece, procured for her by the Maymarts from Antonio Bonelli, actually the head of the Bella Coscie.

It rained the day they all went to Vivario, as it always does rain in those beastly mountain countries, and a nice job they had, Mamma said, picking their way up the approach to the inn, which was like a watercourse or worse—a drain. An ordinary farmyard midden was right under the windows—all rotting straw and manure and things. The ground floor was stables, like in a north-country peel tower, where they kept cows, pigs and fowls, and it smelt so that Sir Frederick Barton held his nose going up the stone steps outside the wall of the house, the only way to the restaurant on the second floor! They were awfully glad they had not arranged to stay all night. The dining-room had flitches of bacon hanging from the ceiling, and the ceiling itself just dirty brown canvas looped up here and there like an old market woman's petticoat, hiding God knows what! Mamma thought of the bats hanging in the old barn at Uncle Horace's place at Hedingham and made up her mind to fly as soon as they had had something to eat, retrieve Papa at Corte and get back to nice, comparatively civilised Ajaccio. The landlady, a handsome, dignified old thing, came and talked to them while they ate something sticky which made Mamma feel sick, but it was all there was, she said, except a sort of mess of pottage made of chestnuts that they said was the national dish. The Corsicans all looked like hungry, shabby Esaus, Mamma said, and all the time she was trying to eat she kept hearing voices either from the ceiling under the canvas or from the door of one of the rooms

opening out of the *salle*, which were locked—Mamma had got up and tried it while the landlady was out of the room. But presently it was opened from the inside and Matalina and Chilina came out. And the hostess, seeming actually afraid of them, introduced them as *mes filles*, who had been educated in a convent in France by their guardian. For she was a widow and he carried one of *les plus beau noms de France*. And on the other side of that locked door were the two rooms which he had had furnished for her daughters, and would Mamma like to see it? And Mamma—you know how romantic she was!—scented a situation at once. They were both so perfectly lovely. Matalina had a complexion that alone would make her a beauty in London, and their hair was beautifully done and their nails attended to, and their manners—countesses at least! She said she would love to and in she went. I don't suppose it was anything so very wonderful but, after the other, it was a revelation of magnificence. Brass French bedsteads and mirrors on the mantelpieces, and a smart dressing-table with ivory brushes on it and, in the sitting-room, embroidered cushions and *causeuses*, and a marble table in the middle with books and albums on it and good pictures. And yet, in the midst of all this comfort and luxury, Mamma's heart, she said, bled for those two poor things; they looked so terribly unhappy! Their eyes, especially Chilina's—the brown-faced one and least good-looking—were like those of stricken deer—desperate—a captive begging for someone to rescue her!

The men, of course, had not been invited in. The girls were evidently as particular as we should be, but while Mamma was in there making friends, Uncle Horace and Sir Frederick seem to have been making up their minds. Sir Frederick was wild about the one with the complexion and wanted to paint her immediately as Fredegonda. She was the eldest though much the most attractive, but Uncle Horace, Mamma said, had made up his mind to actually *marry* the youngest. So when Mamma came back he sent Sir Frederick off to the kitchen where the mother was, to pay the bill, and took Mamma outside on the step and suggested that she should go back and invite her two young friends to come along with them, and he would give them a trip on the yacht somewhere or other. And Mamma, thinking of Chilina's sad eyes, agreed and Madame mère was approached and told of the splendid yacht *en rade* at Ajaccio, and all that, and brought to admit that she *was* rather worried about Chilina—*que cette enfant avait eu des crises affreuses* lately. But the old lady was cunning and probably desired to verify a little, so she said to-morrow would be soon enough and they would come down to Ajaccio by diligence when they had got their things ready. And I suppose the verifications were satisfactory, the tonnage of the yacht, the number of the crew, the obvious devotion of the rich English milord and the rest of it impressed the mother. Perhaps the daughters had a say in it, for next day they appeared with their boxes, all agog for the trip—but it was to Paris! And the guardian was telegraphed for—I don't know by whom—and he saw Papa, which did the trick. Everyone always took to dear Papa and trusted him—you know what an obvious good darling he looked! and arrangements were made. There were even some documents. I know that Uncle Horace gave Mamma four hundred pounds towards the girls' keep in London, as Papa wasn't, as you know,

so very rich *then*, but Mamma promptly passed it on to buy clothes with in Paris. I've seen their receipt. She did say that, if they liked, they might take it out in teaching her children French and embroidery, for they spoke beautiful French and sewed like angels. They did try, as you know, but naturally they cared more for going out to parties than drumming French into three naughty children. They had an immense success among the artists anyway, though that doesn't lead to marrying. Sir Frederick didn't paint Matalina as Fredegonda—he disapproved always of Mamma's bringing them away, old crabstick!—but Alma Tadema did. Rossetti admired Chilina and did her as "Sidonia." Mamma used to take her to sit. She just looked like Sidonia, he said—sad and wilful, gentle and vindictive. Matalina got two offers, both from artists. But it all fell through, though Mamma did her best, regarding herself as rather pledged to get them off. For some time people considered Chilina the proper prey of Uncle Horace, but, poor girl, she began to look more and more delicate. She ate too many cakes and *dragées*, I always thought. Uncle Horace was such an old flirt and difficult to please, and somehow he faded out and Mamma was pretty annoyed with him. Poor wretch, he was getting old and had smoked till his digestion gave out and he wanted looking after, so he fell back into the hands of Mrs. James that he had had for ages, who knew him through and through and was able to be what he wanted—a sort of nurse—which Chilina never could have been. She was beautiful, I grant you, but selfish and lazy—a born aristocrat. I sometimes wonder—I suppose I oughtn't to say this to you, a maiden, but you're going to be married and then you'll know all there is to know—I shouldn't be surprised if the father of Chilina and Matalina weren't different people—and that might have been why the mother let them go and try their chances away from people who knew about it—that and their *manque de dot*. Of course there was the so-called guardian, but he was poorish, like all French aristocrats. Well, Mamma played fair. They had the gayest of times here. She hadn't me to take out, so she could give them all her attention. She treated those two girls as if they had been her own daughters and worked hard at finding them husbands, counting, of course, all the time on Uncle Horace for one of them. Monsieur de St. Brice was enraged when he realised that Uncle Horace had not meant anything, although Mamma explained to him that Uncle Horace had not bound himself to do more than give two pretty girls a nice sail, and it was her fault they were brought to London.

"As I tell you," Emmeline wound up, "I think he was a selfish pig and was probably reponsible for the early death of Chilina."

Yes, it was fate. Lelis knew that Matalina still lived in Corsica. She had seen an amateur photograph of Vivario which Matalina had sent to Mrs. Cranmer and had sneaked it. A row of tall houses not unlike those in the Marylebone Road as you drive along to King's Cross, with small straight windows right up to the top, under the overhanging forest of Vizza-Vona. No white at all showed over their roofs. Depressing—yet, when Cecil proposed and Emmeline, as head of the family, gave her consent reluctantly—"I don't approve of cousins marrying, and Cecil is too old for you and has been a long time making up his mind—he's

going to be fat and like his father. I won't say he isn't as fond of you as he can be of anyone, and he's a famous author and will, I daresay, give you what he can spare from his books." Lelis declared that she meant to go to Corsica for her honeymoon. Emmeline said it was absurd to want to go and look up Matalina, who would probably rather have nothing more to do with them. She had ceased writing long ago. No one knew what had happened or been said . . . it was surely better to let sleeping dogs lie than go poking them up, making sudden irruptions into their lairs. Why not go to Minorca for Cecil's chest, which he always says isn't strong, looking all the time as if he could fell an ox. . . .

The "sleeping dog" clause intrigued the younger sister, but when she pressed for more information her elder told her to go to Cecil, who had been old enough when it happened to know all about it. But Lelis had much better not, for Cecil had been devoted to his father and the episode of the Corsican Sisters, whichever way you looked at it, didn't reflect credit on Uncle Horace, who was and behaved as selfish as they make them, though perhaps not more than Cecil. . . .

"Leave Cecil alone!" Lelis said pettishly. "Cecil is *not* selfish and would give his life for me as soon as look at me, whatever you may say."

"He'd find it less trouble, perhaps?" said Emmeline, "for you are an *exigeante* child, you know, Lelis. We've spoiled you, Isabelle and I, you being the youngest."

Isabelle was now a nun and Lelis was more like Emmeline's daughter than a sister.

Cecil, whose mind was now set on his Life of Cromwell—not the interesting one, but Henry VIII's friend, which he had accepted a commission to write, gave Lelis her choice. She chose Corsica and he agreed, but he made short work of her questions. He told her to go for the history to Gregorovius and for the flora and fauna to Barry, whose book he had reviewed once when interested in arboriculture, among other things. There was *Travels*, by Edward Lear, who also wrote the Nonsense books, and, oh yes, there was the Tour of Lady Susan Nottingham, a sort of distant relation of the De La Gardes, now probably dead, whom he fancied had in her book described the Mademoiselles on their native heath. Lady Susan had gone there, he believed, in the very year of the girls' return from their English visit. He hadn't read it, oh no: "the usual feminine gup about countries they know nothing about and don't want to, except to assess the various capacities for discomfort at the various hotels."

Cecil was rather contemptuous of women's work! He liked women silly, Emmeline said, and was only marrying Lelis because she shone pre-eminently in that particular.

Lady Susan Nottingham's book *was* rather "gup," but there was one pregnant sentence which was tacked on to a silly account of the village of Vivario—"the jewel of all the setting, for there Romance still lived and there I came in contact with it. A distant relation of mine of the ancient Huguenot family of De La Garde told me the rights—or the wrongs—of it a few years before she died, but I do not print it here as the actors in the tiny tragedy may still be living."

Lelis looked up Lady Susan in Debrett, found her address and wrote to her

heretofore unclaimed relation, telling her who she was. In time she received a letter accepting her as a relation and ending formally:

"If a little word-sketch of the quaint stay of herself and two young men under the chaperonage of a month-old bride and bridegroom at Vivario would interest Miss Lelis Cranmer, Lady Susan would try to recall some of the incidents.

"We reached Vivario on a Saturday evening, having decided to spend Sunday there. It was not luxurious—" Here followed a description of the midden approach, together with the main steps being outside and the *salle à manger*, which Lelis was beginning to know like the palm of her hand. "Of two doors securely locked, one was opened for us and gave on to two very small bedrooms. This was all the accommodation at our disposal, but from the shape of the house there were plenty of others, though it was obvious someone slept on six chairs in the *salle à manger*.

"The inn was decidedly on the down grade—neglected—much worse surely than it had been when our friends had been there. The handsome, surly hostess evidently did not care to have clients at all and gave us a horrid supper. In our bedroom Gertrude Talbot and I concocted some mulled claret over a spirit lamp and served it in the tiny wash-basin. We had one. Walter and Jane Scrope, in the other room, had none. The two boys, as far as I know, camped out on the six chairs. And so to bed. I noticed a cloud on Walter's usually cheerful face next morning. Jane looked pensive and said she had been disturbed by movements in the locked-up room. It was all very puzzling, but we went on an expedition into the mountain and forgot about it till we came back to a most wretched supper.

"Next morning the married pair looked still more puzzled, and Jane Scrope said that a most extraordinary state of affairs existed in the inn. She had peeped through the keyhole of the locked door and then had pumped a sort of maid they called Ò Jù. The hostess had two daughters, it appeared, marvels of cleverness and beauty, who occupied the two other rooms, furnished splendidly. Jane did not mention her eavesdropping, but sent some sort of message to the young ladies. I don't know how she did it but, by midday, she had managed a visit to *ces demoiselles*. Their rooms were arranged in the height of comfort and they received her nicely and were very good-looking themselves, but rather sour, but well dressed, and their hair was arranged far better than us travellers.

"I was too young in those days to be taken into my chaperon's confidence. She vouchsafed no theories as we all went back to Ajaccio, but I gathered from one of the boys that the two beautiful young women were 'under a cloud'—fancy there being foreign clouds as well as English ones!—and weren't well spoken of in the village, and this it was made their mother so reticent and disagreeable. She was trying to repair her fault by not letting them out of her sight. They were what the French call *en pénitence*—in prison, I call it. It appears that, years ago, they had run away, the two of them, with an English milord on his yacht, *the mother consenting*, but that both returned without a ring. No one would marry either of them after that. My memory hardly serves me here, but I believe there was one man—a brigand, Tommy said—who had vowed to avenge

the insult if the English milord ever came back to gloat over the ruin he had made. Of course the heartless villain hadn't put in an appearance up to date."

Old Sir Frederick Barton was still alive—grown older and crustier. Lelis wrote to him.

"Yes," he wrote, "I do remember the dirty little hotel at Vivario and its ladder entrance where the fowls stalked up to bed at night. Thank God we were only there for a lunch! I couldn't have stood more. The landlady was an extremely handsome peasant woman who looked as if *elle avait fait des siennes*. Do you know what that means? And she had two most surprising daughters who came out of an inner chamber somewhere while we were eating, dressed up like Parisiennes. I gathered that they did not do a stroke of work to help their mother, but just beamed forth now and again. Your Uncle De La Garde was so struck by one of them that he insisted on carrying her off; the other sister, by far the handsomest in my opinion, was thrown in as chaperon. I fancy I heard later, through Lear, that they were French, the offspring of the jolly landlady and of noble blood on the other side. The old Marquis de St. Brice, whose grandmother had been Bedchamber Woman to Marie Antoinette and perished in the sack of the Tuileries in 1791, was their Papa and had insisted on their being bred up as ladies.

"But, my dear child, I have heard no more of them. I left the yacht *subito* at Leghorn—a difference of opinion with your Uncle Horace—God rest his soul! And they must all be dead by now."

Yes, it was Fate. She would go. But she did not talk of Corsica yet. Before setting out on her honeymoon she had informed herself of the possibilities of going there from Marseilles, or from Nice, and, if you were keen on a short passage, Leghorn. But she consented to go to Avignon, Arles, and St. Rémy, where Cecil rather wanted to investigate the defects in the architectural plans of the Roman builders who, it seemed of *malice prépense*, went in for want of symmetry, evidenced in the Arch of Marius at St. Rémy, slightly out of the square and the perpendicular, and the Maison Carée at Nîmes with one pillar less on the *left* side—was it? Lelis only half understood, but she agreed that St. Rémy would be very nice, for she and Cecil could climb up the little Alpilles and wander over the ruins of the Château d'Amour.

Cecil was lovely to go about with; he told you all about everything in his languid, slightly detached voice, and it was your fault if you didn't understand. He was lucid enough but he knew so much and assumed you did . . . and didn't much care whether you did or not.

He was a very tall, golden-haired, fresh-complexioned Englishman. The supposed Huguenot descent of the De La Gardes did not show in him. Emmeline always said he looked like a German, the country where he was educated and where he got his thoroughness. Through the sedentary author's life he led he was inclined to be stout, and of body he was lazy, though of mind active. He was admirably good-tempered though he hardly ever smiled, and never with his eyes. They were blue and quite inexpressive. He had lovely hands with which he made

gestures, and clumsy feet on which he hated walking, though he could lift anything. A weary giant. With the lever of his voice he could wheedle you into any plan he chose to conceive, however inconvenient, if he had set his mind on it. On the other hand, if he didn't very much care, he gave way with a grace. She adored him! He adored her, and wondered why he had not found it out sooner. She was not more than nineteen now. It was because they had been brought up together and the schoolgirl—long-nosed, with a pigtail, and the sort of thin, spanking legs that seem inevitable and universal then—was odious to him. He was fond of children and they of him, but he made a good gap in between while girls grew up into women. Then as feminine as you please, with all the feminine foibles, waists, Chinese feet if you like, mendacity, greediness, impure thoughts —those queer demoralising conventional confessions! But courage—always courage, even if you pretended to be afraid, so as to be in the picture. She had been well educated, could add up—and *subtract*, Emmeline said—knew her dates, sang, danced, drew a little, spoke three languages and wrote a beautiful hand, but her mind was just a fair, white sheet for him to make impressionist splashes on. Cecil liked them like that. Lelis, by the time she married him, was well able to appreciate Cecil's attitude to the half of civilisation. Sexual knowledge notwithstanding, she was quite expert at playing the sweet simpleton on occasion, entirely unhampered by her knowledge. Another reason for which Cecil liked her was that she was just a little straight-laced, even *dévote*, through the training of her two sisters, Emmeline, a martinet, and Isabelle, a nun. She was made for love—to corrupt if one liked—but one wouldn't. One would only open her mind and let her see the difference, or want of difference, between good and evil.

Her looks, he said, were actually suggested by the coat of arms quartered by the old Huguenot families of Cranmer and De La Garde—"a hand holding a lily in full bloom on an azure field *sémé* gold trefoils." He would always have liked to dress her in blue and gold, though, of course, he did not object to tweeds in travelling, and Lelis, who observed some rather stringent sartorial rules, did not object to being just a little Pre-Raphaelite in the evenings.

That was what she was. A glowing figure out of a tapestry, with golden hair, sloping shoulders, a rather narrow chest, a pale but healthy complexion less roses than lilies, and a small mouth with pearly teeth that she wore always a little open—pathetically . . . like the mediæval maiden whom knights fight for till their blood dyes the grass, watching the combat, never knowing if the luck will not be against her particular knight and so empower the other to carry her off. She would look well, Cecil said, naked, tied to a tree and lots of blood about. Those were the sort of things he said that put Emmeline against him!

So, for the present, holding her strong desire in reserve, Lelis was quite happy wandering with Cecil over the pastures of Provence, noting the grass that tinkled with dryness and was bleached with sun, listening to the sheep bells or creeping along the crumbling, low, grey walls to watch the lizards, oppressed by her shadow, disappearing into crannies. Sometimes, to know again what shade was, they would descend into the dank and dark Roman quarries under the hills, or ascend those hills in search of a breeze, the bride easily reaching and sitting

on the topmost peak of a little Alpille deriding her mate who toiled after her. Or listening at sunset to the yellow-bellied frogs' evening song—Brek-kek-kek-coax-coax!—or in her stall beside Cecil in the funny Pathé Cinema theatre. But always, always at the back of her mind were the snows of Monte D'Oro, the chestnut trees of Bocognano, the gorges of L'Inzecca and the rainbows of Fium' Orbe, the Blind River.

One day, after they had been to Aigues Mortes, St. Gilles and Montmajour and she had given Cecil a real go at old churches, she told him that she had written to Matalina at Vivario—Madame Bonelli. He did not seem to take it in, he was so busy looking for the old rings in the quay by the town wall among the reeds, to which St. Louis had moored his boats when he started for the Crusades. And then she began to tempt him with *bouillabaisse* at Marseilles—Cecil and she were by way of being pioneers in new and out-of-the-way greedy dishes—and led him on to tell her about the Corsican dish, Peverata. Once, above Corte, people had such a glut of wine that they threw some of it away into the Restonica and, presently, the drunken trout came floating on their backs down to Corte. A child could tickle them and catch them. So now, as they did then, the Cortesians cook them first in oil and then in a sort of *soupe au vin*, with tomatoes and salt and vegetables and—the rest is pepper—*poivre, encore du poivre et toujours du poivre!* And it's delicious.

She spoke of going to Corsica again at night, as if it were a settled thing—she had found that a good way with Cecil. She said, "Marseilles is really so near; we ought to run across and see Napoleon's birthplace."

Cecil smiled.

"Why run? Eighteen hours by sea."

"We're both good sailors, and once we are at Ajaccio we might go up into the interior, and see Matalina, that is, if she ever answers my letter. You said I might write it."

"I didn't. You did."

"She may be dead, but, if by any chance she asks us up to stay, you will be able to get some shooting—moufflon is the thing in Corsica."

"There are none left."

"Oh, well then, fishing in the Tavignano or the Restonica?"

"Neither. The Gravona. My dear, you forget, I'm an author and neither fish nor shoot. I'll stop quietly down in the hotel here and get on with Cromwell, and you can go into the interior and look up your old governess and beat up ancient scandals with her to your heart's content."

"Fancy coming all the way to Corsica to write a life of Cromwell! Oh no, Cecil. I could not go without you. The roads are good but not safe."

"Both. Perfectly. Bandits don't go for travellers. They might for me, conceivably. . . ."

"Cecil, don't tease me. Whatever should they go for you for?"

"I don't know. . . ." He used his ordinary fence of vague, pathetic, engaging negation. "There's a blood feud now in full swing that has been going on since

the seventeenth century. The Sampieri and the Alesani. . . ." He became oratorical. "If all the blood shed on the *verdamnte* island, as my professor used to say, was made visible, the name of a part might be given to a whole. Isola Rossa—Les îles Sanguinaires—red porphyry over a land-locked lake of crimson. . . . In thirty years twenty-eight thousand persons fell in these silly quarrels about trifles —a dog, a date, a measurement, a sister seduced or an acre of land misappropriated. Of course they were shamefully governed under the Genoese. Justice was venal."

"I don't know exactly what that means."

"It means that there was no pretence of justice—not for Corsicans, at least—so they were obliged to take the law into their own hands. Unfortunately they are an affectionate, clinging sort of people. The highest term of endearment is 'brother,' and 'brother' is taken to include the whole clan, down to cousins' cousins and uncles' uncles. . . . So, when one man has done another in for a perfectly good reason as morality goes in this island, there is nothing for him but *schioppetto, stiletto* or *strada*—gun, dagger or get out. There's no disgrace; it's an honour, on the contrary. *Qui se venge se purifie.* Time was when no respectable family in the island was without a relative away for his health or gone abroad for his country's good. But Monsieur le Brigand is perfectly safe as long as he stops in these mountain gorges with their secret ways leading down to the sea, where he can see reluctant pursuers and faint-hearted gendarmes coming a mile off and take his measures accordingly. They're not keen on catching him. The one danger for a bandit really is the farcical one of running up against another bandit who happens to have an outstanding grudge against him. . . ."

—"Like a Gilbert and Sullivan play," Lelis said.

—"While below, all his kinsmen know perfectly well that it isn't only an eye for an eye but somebody else's eye for somebody else's tooth and immediately *cappar le fenestre*—block up all the windows with feather-beds, mattresses and straw, leaving only little holes to shoot out of. All the houses are built for defence with small, high windows. One man, Jean de Vescovato, and his wife Santia, lived for seven years like that—never daring to look out of the window or to go out, and the moment he did put his nose out of the door he was shot."

"Oh, do go on, Cecil. These people do so interest me."

"They don't me." He had been talking about them for an hour. "I cannot get up the slightest interest for a people so devoid of all art feeling—proper feeling of any kind. Shabby and sullen; mindless and lazy. Yet, the soil is so fertile that they say, if you were to thrust a broom-handle into the ground it would flower. But, for Monsieur le Corsican, goats and chestnuts are what potatoes and pigs are for the Irishman. Six of each will feed his family and his pig too, and there are twenty-four different ways of cooking them. Once the French Government thought of cutting down all the trees so as to make the beggars work instead of lounging about all day with firearms, gossiping while their women at home compose *voceri* and invent hellish tortures for the *curé* in the next village.

"The Vendetta habit has grown upon them, women and all, until the smell of powder's incense to their nostrils. It's just the result of national boredom—

the protest of a country for hundreds of years under alien rule, like Ireland. They've got to have some fun of their lives. And it's a great game! You know even if you were to give a burglar a competence he would still go on burgling for the sake of the excitement. And the dull, urban cracking of cribs by night is nothing to the outdoor amusement of stalking your object, day in day out, through the *maquis* that conceals pursued from pursuer and vice versa. *E bugiardo come la scopa*—the heather is a traitor, or, rather, an impartial arbitrator between two combatants. Imagine a wall six feet high—"

"Made of—?" she inquired in his ear, from where she lay sleepily, her head on his shoulder, on the one arm-chair.

"Cypress, olive, dwarf oak, sycamore, evergreen, thorn, box, ilex, lentisk, arbutus, oleander, laurustinus, flowering myrtle, wild vine, cytisus—the common weed of Corsica—clematis, rhododendron, tamarisk. . . ."

She said, "It's like saying over something to send you to sleep. . . ."

"And I do that, don't I? Boring you?" But he went on: "The white heather is, of course, the foundation of the *macchia* and the arena of the bandit. They're quite smart people really, like gladiators or prize-fighters. They have gardens and flocks of cattle and vineyards, and Grand Duchesses beg to be allowed to pay them visits up in their fastnesses. They date their letters from the *Palazzo Verde* and get herdsmen to put them in the post—drop them in the *boîte* of the diligence—and their friends send them food and get game in return. . . ."

"What Duchess?" Lelis asked. "I must go to bed."

"Saxe Weimar, I believe. Look here. I see you mean to take me to Corsica and get me killed. I know that you've actually a letter in your pocket from your barbaric governess. Confess?"

She confessed. She thought it was wonderful how Cecil could see a letter through her clothes.

"Well, we'll go. It's not very healthy for me, but we'll go."

"Why, Cecil? Your throat?"

"Yes, dear. My throat or my head or, more likely, my stomach. That's the worst place, especially if you've dined well. But probably I shan't dine well, there. . . ."

He put her off his knee. He spoke fast, for him.

"Yes, dear. You'll soon get rid of me there and marry a nice bandit and reign in the Green Palace of Pentica—not Piccadilly—and have Duchesses walk up and call on you. It's all the same."

Lelis did not much like Ajaccio, where they landed. She soon got used to the novelty of the hedges of orange and palms bordering the streets; Napoleon's house bored her—the shops were poor and she wanted something for Emmeline. Strolling along the main street with Cecil before their train started for Vivario, she pulled up in front of the window of a bric-à-brac shop. It displayed a tray of cheap ornaments and two things that looked like gigantic penknives made in white bone and inlaid with black spirals and markings and set with the, to her, magic word *Vendetta*.

Just right for Emmeline! She darted in and Cecil slowly followed her. The

shopman seemed asleep, dozing by his fire, pipe in mouth, and the *Corriere di Bastia* open on his knees.

"Isn't he afraid his things will get stolen?"

"Oh, no. They're beasts, not thieves."

Lelis began to rummage in the trays while the salesman shrugged himself awake. . . .

"*Madame désire un souvenir?* Alas! These are new daggers—not very sharp. I could not sell Monsieur one of these *comme souvenir de la belle Corse*. Monsieur is going up into the interior? Monsieur would probably like a gun? Here is one I can recommend . . . thin—*calibre étroit*—but carrying very far."

"We want one of these," Lelis said sturdily, holding out a dagger she had selected.

"*Mais non, Madame. Comme souvenir, Madame ferait mieux* to buy, from a peasant, a dagger that has been—used."

He spoke without intention; he had taken their absurd measure—mad and rich English who wanted the real thing to show to their friends at home. The man, moreover, was entirely under the dominion of his silly, pretty wife. She cried out:

"Oh yes, Cecil, let us have the real thing, of course. A real Corsican knife—perhaps with blood on it? How nice of the man to tell us—not want to cheat us. . . . No, Cecil, you *don't* want a gun."

For Cecil was actually in treaty for one, though everyone knew that he didn't shoot and that, if he could, moufflon was practically extinct. She was rather distressed and showed it. As they left the shop, Lelis carrying the silly gun, Cecil said:

"Don't be cross with me, dear. One had to buy something, *richissime* as we are, and those stylets were common—quite unworthy of you. . . . *Cane Canisti* . . . !" he hummed. "Give me the gun. That man is quite right; the gun is the only fit memento of Corsica. *Cane Canisti, Putra Ascendisti, Ó Christú Offendisti.* Translate if you can—"

She was astounded that he knew it. She began:

"Dear little dog—Smoke, ascend—"

"No! Go off, go off—Or God will be angry. For the gun is the life, and if it refuses, like a horse at a fence, the man's done. So he consults a witch and gets a charm said over it. 'Holy Mother of God, arrange that I may meet my enemy to-morrow and kill him without anything happening to me at all, at all!' Extraordinary, tragic fatuity!"

"Yes, it does sound mean. But, fancy going into a jeweller's shop in Dover or Folkestone, on landing, and being recommended to buy a knife that *has already been used* on somebody! I am enjoying myself, aren't you?"

"Surely," said Cecil serenely. He was so nice to go about with.

Corsica had begun well with daggers and things, but she was annoyed when the railway, leaving behind the streets of palms and gardens of orange trees like those she had seen in Egypt, the green embankments with railwaymen's gardens of giant cactus lying about sprouting like cabbages, ascended into a region of

quiet fields and gentle streams meandering. "One might as well be in Surrey!" she said disappointedly.

Cecil was humming something. "Do you remember," he asked her, "that song of Handel's your mother used to sing at Bamborough? *O Gentle Peace, with Plenty Crowned!* Yes, I prefer pastoral landscape—mountains are stagy—too like a set scene. They frighten me with their clumsy primitiveness. Great purple monsters at play . . . giants waiting, hands on haunches . . . ironical . . . up there where we are slowly, surely going. . . . It will be very imposing and very ugly. You don't get very far in this country without thinking of Hell and Salvator Rosa."

"Darling Cecil, if it really becomes too terrible I shall come across and sit on your knee."

She waited, and soon she became afraid of mountains too—of nearly everything. The last hour had been enough to try anybody's nerves. Egypt, then back to Surrey, and then a stupendous sort of Wales or Scotland, a land where a Skiddaw or a Grampian would have made the effect of a hillock that a mole throws up in a night. Yes, it was Doré, or Salvator Rosa, in full blast, splendid, imposing, not ugly but tremendously uncomfortable. One violent sensation after another. But all the while, like Cecil in his corner with his newspaper that he continued to read, the little, single, baby-line of railway wound in and out reasonably, persuasively, poised one moment on the crests of limestone crags crocketed like cathedrals, the next flung tenuous as the strand of a spider's web over torrents rolling soundless beneath, except when enormous, apparently insuperable obstacles made of granite and porphyry intercepted them, withstood them. Lelis would laugh with delight like a child when sudden waterfalls, steaming and hissing with cold, not heat, tossed up showers, prismatic in the sunbeams that caught them on their sudden elevation, against the very carriage windows. Grey spirals of stone raised themselves up from beds of green that were the tufted tops and plumes of giant pines, whose stark branchless trunks stood presumably rooted in the river-bed below. And, looking down, Lelis could catch a glimpse of the road that wound along the side of the river, its width supported on uneven wooden baulks that stretched out over the stream . . . a serene, well-kept, useable road. . . .

Higher and higher they mounted till the road only showed like a white selvedge to the brown ribbon it ran beside, and Lelis gave up seeking for minutiæ of civilisation and raised her eyes steadfastly to what she was told were Monte Rotondo and Monte D'Oro poised high in the blue crystalline sky.

Cecil sat amused and calm on the other side of the carriage while, blotted into her corner with her feet drawn under her, she attempted to express her sense of altered values, her human quailing before spectacular immensities. . . .

"It's like at Earl's Court," she murmured, "when they forced me into the switchback and I had to clutch somebody. But you're reading! . . . Or I keep imagining that I'm Zazel looping the loop over precipices and gulfs. . . . One doesn't know if the mountains or the gorges are uppermost. . . ."

Cecil said that that last was rather good, and filled his pipe. What she wanted,

and he may have lazily guessed it though he said nothing, was that he should come across to her corner and take her in his arms and hold her there, letting her survey and absorb these wonders from the shelter of his big human personality. He did not do it. Perhaps he was hardening her? He talked to her about some engineering problems suggested to him by his paper, and his phrases, though happy and well chosen, were not particularly reassuring; for instance:

"The French are clever—and reckless. These slight, tipsome bridges that we're on—flung so artlessly across nothing—*le néant*. . . ."

He went on to remark that this railway represented France's gift to Corsica when she colonised her, and had cost over five hundred thousand francs for the hundred and eighty-five miles it served, and that the French had since repented their generosity, since the Corsican chicaners had put their heads together and sold them the land for it at forty times its value, and would neither work it nor pay for it. They were, nevertheless, awfully proud of their baby engines and tiny carriages and their pace of twelve miles an hour. Then he went on to the *déboisement* of Corsica that was going on, which would eventually be its ruin and end. The water would be lost to them, since the soil of the denuded hillsides would go down to choke up the mouths of the streams. . . . Sawmills, of which Corsica was full, were all wrong. The sale of timber should be reduced, not increased. The heath, too, was going for briar and wood pipes and the chestnut trees all being cut down for pyrogallic acid.

She murmured, "I almost wish, darling, that we hadn't come."

"You *would* come, darling," Cecil answered her with seriousness. "On your little head be it."

If he had not used the qualifying adjective Lelis would have screamed. And presently—for the rainbow showers and variegated spray had implied rain—rain became a really important factor of the landscape, the merciful mountain rain which falls more or less as a matter of course, meekening the horrors, softening the spikes and jags, deadening the roar and flattening the ridges of the river's flow. The young girl was used to that sort of thing at Coniston and Aviemore. She complained of it there, but here it seemed to allay the anguish, to sober and to soothe her. She was excited hideously, drunk with the exhilaration of high altitudes, overwhelmed by the spectacle of forests voluptuously overhanging the high-shouldered cliffs, stunned by prehistoric noises, the bellowing of mastodon waterfalls, the deeper but more terrifying roar of rivers in spate so that the patient, even drip of rain against the windows making the usual soothing and monotonous impact on her town-bred ear was welcome.

And now the scenery grew quieter, uglier, less like Salvator and more like Mürren. But it was nice to get out of the portentous gorges of porphyry and granite, the grey-green, moss-covered boulders of limestone that held, vice-like, the gnarled and twisted bones of trees full-boughed, prisoned monsters whose arms and legs were writhing in agony, caught for ever between two precipices till they rotted. . . .

The little railway was forging up through Vizza-Vona, that great unearthly forest that is nearly a fourth part of Corsica, composed, Cecil said, mainly of

Lariccio (*Pinus larix*), the trees, some of them, four hundred years old . . . sheerly impenetrable in places . . . people got lost there—well lost. . . .

Among the pines were large patches of chestnut whose red and brown branches, mixed with the soft new green of the beeches, reminded Lelis of a young woman's face wigged with red false hair. Cecil was teaching her to make comparisons—find juxtapositions. And he was now murmuring what Virgil said to Dante following him into the dark wood of Purgatory—"*My son, my son, here is Agony—but not Death.* . . ." How Cecil and she understood one another!

Ghisone on the station boards, and the Gravona that had been treacly-brown in the groves of night that they had come through, born again but not regenerate, brawled by the side of the even white road from Ajaccio, which stretched along on a level with the carriage. Its innocent green banks were dotted with tiny lilac crocuses that Lelis would have liked to get out and pick. There were cheerful noises, too; music, the fluting of the *zufoli*, the drone of the *cornemuse* and the crackling of whips and the hoarse "Huë youp!" with which drivers, in their pink cotton smocks, cheered on their faltering, ill-fed beasts. The road was dotted with wayfarers, men wearing the shaggy *pilone* of which she had heard, but mostly brown velvet coats and always the leathern cartridge belt and gun on shoulder. Women were mostly in black or blue homespun, and on their heads—yes—the famous *mandile!* There was a lot, especially on the children, of a peculiar shade of venous red that set Lelis's teeth on edge as did unripe currants. Some of the women, broad-hatted, rode astride with an umbrella held up to protect their merchandise. To the random sound of flageolet and bagpipe that filled the little street, little black kids waltzed standing on their hind legs, and a sardonic bear danced, for it was market day in Bocognano.

Bocognano, the wickedest village in Corsica except Sullacaro and Sartine . . . drenched in blood, so Cecil had told her. A row of cheerless houses each sheltered its mournful chestnut tree, the colour of old, caked, dried blood, stupid and sullen yet crying for more. Blood inherent, blood all over, even in the fresh shed pink of the little children's frocks. Their parents must wilfully choose that shade. . . .

"No, I never, never will come here," she said aloud. "There will be the same dear little kids in Vivario—the most virtuous village in Corsica."

Things were already more cheerful. Greenhouse shrubs under the sheltering eyebrows, as it were, of Monte D'Oro, where the thaw was making ragged the pure white expanse beyond where eagles circled.

"Tattone," said Cecil suddenly, coming over to her. "Eight hundred and two metres altitude. Gatti di Vivario the next stop. Prepare to receive the embraces of your barbaric governess. Take mine first. Perhaps I shall not want to kiss you afterwards?"

"How do you know she will come to meet us?"

"She *has* come. I see her standing on the platform with her husband—and an old maid with a wheelbarrow."

Cecil could see true. Vivario station was like any other station, peasants getting in, peasants getting out, but, on the wide, windy platform a group of three

stood steadfast, waiting till the dispersion of all the others should define their guests. The woman was dressed in black relieved by white, like any prosperous bourgeoise of Passy or Asnières. By her side was a little oldish man wearing a pointed bonnet, a sort of Phrygian cap or biretta. His hair, iron-grey and lots of it, fell over a red handkerchief twisted round his neck fourfold instead of a collar. He looked like a workman beside his wife. The woman standing with them respectfully, was bare-headed except for a spotted scarf wound round her brow and falling in a coloured streak down her shoulder. She maintained a hand barrow with a tarpaulin over it, and when Lelis saw this was designed for their luggage she was glad she was in the habit of travelling light.

"*Mon mari!*" the lady, introducing the peasant, said.

"Mine!" said Lelis, shivering in the windy rain, giving over her handbag to Cecil so as to receive in full the welcome of the horrid individual with the greasy, unshaven chin, hard black eyebrows and little tufts of hair jutting out of his ears.

"*Permettez, Madame Lélis, que je vous embrasse.*"

Cecil's protest, for English form's sake about carrying the luggage, disregarded —people never understood Cecil's French very well, somehow—the four preceded the maid and her hand-cart full of luggage up the miry white road with the rain spinning in the puddle holes, through the railway arch like any suburban London one towards a dreary, dowdy row of tall houses backing against the mountain side. Each boasted a tiny garden in front where the retreating snow reminded Lelis of very white linen laid out to dry. Up above them no sky was to be seen because of the overhanging forest just as it was in her photographs at home.

"And this is Italy?" she whispered to Cecil. She was already thinking that Matalina, when she had been carried off to *la froide* and *perfide Angleterre*, had by no means received so considerable a shock and that her return might have been a far greater one.

"No, Corsica!" Cecil said. He was grave and unhappy—obviously not taken with the Mayor of Vivario, who was walking between him and his Lelis. Perhaps he was wondering if the embrace would be repeated *journalièrement*? Lelis was determined to see that it should not.

"Vivario is a *station d'été*. It has a thousand inhabitants," Cecil was saying to them in French. "It lies in a natural amphitheatre. . . ."

These members of the indigenous population were probably aware of these statistics, and Lelis could see for herself that the main street was just a shelf in the mountains, all ridgy and twisted round the sides of a big wide bowl with a river at the bottom of it. But she was mostly keeping her eyes on the ground, picking her way among pigs and goats that got between her legs and nearly threw her down among the pashed-up stickiness.

"*Par ici!*" said Matalina suddenly, with no sense of shame leading her guests up the track of a watercourse. There were three separate streams—or drains—flowing down the gentle slope of natural sand rock which they avoided, picking out the ruts. A patch of the midden spoken of by Lady Susan lingered in a corner under the north wall of the house where a brown horse was standing, crook-

kneed, in dirty stained straw. Lelis shuddered and mentally condemned all Catholic countries.

They mounted the famous outside steps, washed clean by the rain and betraying no sign of fowls, which had been probably trained by now to go to bed another way.

"And here's your Aunt Susan's canvas velarium!" Cecil whispered as they were conducted into the *salle à manger*, "sagging perhaps a little lower down as if some stupid, inglorious heaven was about to fall on us."

"And six cats," said Lelis quite reconciled.

And for them, there was a very large, half-attic room whose floor gleamed mica-like with many washings. There was one door on the north looking towards Ajaccio whence they had come, with a glass pane in it, leading on to a balcony, and a window looking south, but dark at noonday because of the mountain behind and the overhanging forest. A window that Lelis decided not to look out of, or draw its clean white dimity curtains because it would depress her. The two large beds, placed in opposite corners, had, for Lelis looked, a gay-coloured rug and two white blankets each. The roof was just looped-up canvas like the other rooms, and hung so low on the two sides where the beds were that anyone lying in them could touch it with a hand. There was, over the mantelpiece, a replica of Rossetti's portrait of Chilina. There were two *prie-Dieu* chairs and a *bénitier* and sacred pictures over each bed.

"*La belle Matalina*," said Cecil, "appears to have turned *dévote*. *Quand la poitrine descende, vertu se releve!* She *would* fade early. Her chief merit, I understand, was complexion."

And: "They are not running this place as an inn any more," as a knock at the door summoned them to supper. Matalina, who had probably cooked it, was standing formally to receive them draped in a priceless, black lace Spanish shawl. Her husband, at her side, still wore his mousy biretta and red handkerchief. The meal was very good; sweetbreads and *broccio* and some unspecified fruits crystallised by Matalina and covered with syrup. Cecil, who hated sweets but was eating them out of politeness, made a secret wry face, and also when cloudy home-made wine was poured into his glass. As soon as a course was ready to be removed Matalina clapped her hands like an Eastern potentate and called loudly, "Ò Jù!" Then the old serving-maid, whose name was Julia, appeared quickly from the kitchen close at hand. Lelis fancied, though she had never heard of Julia, that she might have waited on her mother and Uncle Horace when she was a girl and pretty instead of something like an old gamebag wrinkled and brown. One knew what might have happened then if Uncle Horace had stayed a week instead of a couple of hours and been subjugated by the maid instead of the mistress!

After the meal they passed into the salon, which had been much modernised since the two young girls had sat in it eating out their hearts. Heavy red rep curtains were drawn across the sash windows, and the firelight from the large English grate flickered on their folds and the yard or so of material which lay in pools on the floor under the sills, for warmth perhaps. The room was very hot

and smothery—the fire must have been lit all day and the curtains drawn too. Leaving the pale blue metallic-looking chairs to his guests, the host took his seat on a velvet upholstered one that might have come out of the Tottenham Court Road and stooped forward so that he sat almost under the marble shelf of an English mantelpiece. And, were it not for her consciousness of the black hood of forest hanging like a menace over this side of the house, Lelis might very well have imagined herself to be in some railway or commercial hotel in England.

The room for the moment had no other illumination but that of the fire, to which Monsieur Bonelli, his head almost between his knees, attended ostentatiously every other minute. One could see nothing of his face. He looked like a wolf with his great ears that stuck up beyond the swathes of his cap and the strong tufts of grey hair growing out of them. They could not see well. There was nothing for the strangers to do but try to make conversation, and that was difficult, for, though the old man was supposed to understand French, he seemed more nearly deaf than his wife had cared to own and she had left the room. . . .

Presently she came back carrying a heavy lamp. Cecil rose to help her, and his hostess invited him to observe what he had been sitting on. In the solid gloom she held up the lamp to show off what was surely her proudest possession, the two sofas and the six arm-chairs covered entirely with glistering bead tapestry in pale shades, the work during long years of her hands and those of her sister. Somehow, the fact that Cecil had been sitting on Chilina's handiwork gave Lelis quite a turn. Though why not? The guests admired these monuments of misdirected labour, and then Matalina, gratified, set down the lamp on the table and bade them draw up and peruse the albums containing likenesses of the family, which were laid on it diagonally.

The portraits of the Pancrazie of Muracciole, a hamlet of Vivario, were multiple. Madame Pancrazie was Monsieur Bonelli's sister. Among them, the head of the family after Andrea, Monsieur Regulus Pancrazie, Capitaine de Gendarmerie at Bastia, was repugnant to Lelis and distrusted by her at first sight. She hated the stupid, half-modernised face where new and ill-digested ideas seemed to contend with primordial savagery. Matalina mentioned his name and title each time his likeness appeared till Lelis was sick of the sound of it. Matalina was doing it to please her husband, who liked the sound of it. He said several times: "*Il faut l'inviter ici, ma femme.*" Her "*Oui, oui, Andrea,*" was proudly servile. He spoke again clearly; he seemed to have got the distance, and the portrait of the Captain had perhaps stimulated him. "Show Cecc' Anton' the portrait of Jacques Bonelli. *Il est très beau.*"

"Very handsome indeed," said Lelis dutifully, confronted with the likeness of an individual standing in a clearing of the forest in front of two other armed men, with his gun raised, as if expecting to be attacked. The host got up and stumbled to the table.

"Yes, that is *my* uncle, the famous Jacques Bonelli, the head of the Bella Coscie, the family to which I belong. That is I standing behind him. I was with him then, *alla campagna.*" Matalina looked uncomfortable. "He is there still—has been for years. He is rich. He did his duty. He has never let anyone give him

rimbecco. Never has it happened in our family. We avenge, we of the Bonelli, but we never forget a kindness or spite a pretty woman."

"Yes, Jacques is good," Matalina said. "When he was starving once, Maman sent him food, and a year after, when she took my sister and me for a picnic in Vizza-Vona, Bonelli sent down a boy with a *magnifique* basket of strawberries from their gardens in Pentica. And I have a letter from him. . . ."

She showed it. It was not exactly a nice letter, being neither more nor less than a threat of vengeance unless a request of his was complied with—a post as a diligence driver for one of his people. . . . But it was certainly signed "*Votre bandit dévoué.*"

"He might have been my relation and yours," Cecil whispered to his wife.

Old Andrea had gone back to his fireside, and still desultorily, they turned over pages. Lelis wanted to get to one of Chilina. Likenesses of Matalina constantly occurred, but Matalina had a habit of turning over quickly or laying her hand on them saying, "*Moi, je suis plutôt laid! C'est Chili qu'il faut voir.*"

And presently Lelis recognised the exotic features of Michelina, sharp, delicate, yearning, full of a graceful, wilful discontent as of one determined to be under a doom she had not character enough to carry proudly. But there was a picture of her in costume in which she looked capable of murder, Lelis thought—a changed woman, older, more passionate. And another, so beautiful that it seemed to take Cecil by assault, he who had always pretended to despise her, the girl who, after all, ought to have been his stepmother. Ah, but then she would never have got Cecil, for Cecil would not have objected to his father's giving him a nice pretty young stepmother like Chilina and so would never have come to live with them in Lancaster Gate and got fond of Lelis. Uncle Horace's naughtiness had turned out well for her.

Cecil, actually surprised into briskness, exclaimed: "Why, that's not Chilina, is it? She looks like one of Les Vierges des Rochers. Such wonderful *morbidezza*. . . ."

It sounded rather rude. The old Corsican lifted his head. Never having heard of the book or the Italianate artistic phrase either, he may have thought that the Englishman was insulting his wife's sister. He had an ugly look. . . . Presently he rose, tottered slightly, crossed the room and kissed the hand of Mrs. De La Garde with a certain old-fashioned dignity. In Cecil's direction he gave a curt nod and went out.

Matalina exclaimed: "He is tired. He goes to couch himself, for he sleeps badly. *Des mauvais rêves!* And then he wakes, *tout en sueur.*"

When the sound of Andrea's carpet slippers had faded away—the guests had no notion of where the Bonellis slept—Matalina opened the album again and took out one of the cards that was loose, and which Lelis was sure she had previously covered with her hand, and gave it to Cecil.

"Behold, Cecc' Anton'," she said, "the portrait of Monsieur *votre père!*"

Lelis had never seen one of him. "Oh, let me look!" she said. "He is my father too—now."

"*Oui—heureusement,*" Madame Bonelli permitted herself to say with, so it

struck Lelis, unnecessary emphasis. Rather seriously she addressed her husband. "Take care of her, Cecc' Anton', *cela te vaudra bien.*"

"*She* takes care of *me*," Cecil said, kissing the hand of Madame Bonelli very nicely and then that of his wife, murmuring, "*Mon petit paravent!*" so that Matalina might hear.

Matalina smiled, the beautiful large smile of a peasant Madonna, and Lelis saw suddenly how fair a woman she had been and how un-Corsican she looked . . . so much more like her ancestress who had stood by the French Queen and lost her life. She idly took up the *carte de visite* from Cecil's indifferent hand and turned it over. Three letters were written on the back in the beautiful handwriting, clear and delicate, like a line engraving, that the two sisters used—forming a word? ORA.

"Why is it Ora?" she asked.

"'Ora. 'Orazio," Cecil replied. "Short for Horace, is it not, Madame Bonelli?"

"Oh, you *must* call her Matalina!" Lelis cried, while Matalina put the photograph back, whispering: "It was Chili's. We found it under her pillow after she was dead. *Maintenant, mes enfants, il est temps de nous coucher.* I give you both rendezvous at ten o'clock in this room. We will go out and I will show you our beautiful Vivario, where I hope you will both be very happy *pendant votre petit séjour.*"

The women kissed. Lelis wanted Cecil to kiss Matalina too, but his finer sense rejected that parade of affection as a mistake. . . . But he raked out the ashes of the fire while she put brown holland covers on the six chairs and the two sofas.

"My treasure, don't you see you have just charmed them both? You are just my shield, my mascot. You save it. As I told Madame Bonelli, you make up by your sweetness for my bad habit of getting myself disliked. Don't you see they only tolerate me for your sake? I'm sure I don't know what would happen to me if you weren't there."

"If it wasn't for me you wouldn't be here at all."

"No. . . . That's that!" he said oracularly, lying down in his bed and pulling the clothes over his ears. "So you won't come into mine, my protectress, and let me go to sleep in your arms?"

Of course she came over—she had always meant to do it—pattering over the bare shining boards, first extinguishing the little lamp that was placed on the table in the middle and lighting the odd candle they had brought with them, stuck in a soap-dish, to illumine the last stage to Cecil's bed. She kept it alight long after he had gone to sleep with her kind arms round him, for she could not sleep so easily the first night in a new room. She disliked what Cecil kept calling the Velarium. It was less like the soft yellow sky that hung over Whistler's exhibition than a dowdy, wigwam tent cover, such as she had observed in a visit to the Wild West. It was dirty and it drooped, and a biggish bit of it, that she could see from Cecil's bed but not from hers, had come away, there in the left-hand corner. Nothing, she supposed, could be done to improve matters except some root-and-branch alteration, but she made up her mind to ask Matalina to

have the flap nailed up so as to keep in the rats, spiders, bats, she knew not what, that possibly infested the roof. . . .

Next morning, when Julia had brought in the trays with their breakfasts, Cecil and Lelis discussed them and their last night's meal too.

"I don't like *broccio*," she confessed. "What is it?"

"Chestnuts. Bruised in curdled milk or cream. All the children are reared on it. They must be born fierce—not tired. One wonders what they would grow to if they were nurtured on Lemco or Liebig instead of mild chestnuts?"

"And what's this jam?"

"Arbutus. Little red berries you'll see when you go out. I can't say I like it."

"But you *must* like the honey, Cecil. Matalina sends for it all the way to Ajaccio, she told me."

"I wish they would send for a nice bottle of whisky when they are about it. Those sweet home-made wines are awful. Well. . . . Get up!"

He went sedulously to sleep again, and Lelis, half dressed, feeling strangely alone with Cecil withdrawn from her in sleep, wandered out through the door with a window top that gave egress to the tiny unsubstantial wooden balcony serving their room only, which had been that of the girls. It represented an expensive treat that poor *Maman* Maymart had prepared for Chilina when she was ill, against her recovery. Perhaps Chilina had sat there with her face turned towards Ajaccio, where she had enshipped for the accomplishment of her doom? She had perhaps never been quite strong enough to do that. It would be a trial to anyone's nerves. Lelis felt as if she were on one of those swinging cradles on which painters stand to paint inaccessible wall surfaces every London spring . . . going on now. . . .

In London . . . there would be the Park opposite—cheery, chirruping, of an *eau de Nil* green colour, and beyond, Knightsbridge and its cupolas. Here, in Corsica, there was nothing but a deadly waste of heath between her and a town. A series of shaded curtains, walls of hazy-coloured morning air through which showed hummocks that were actually mountains with names! Leagues and leagues of them, all much the same, forming a rumpled counterpane of greyish, purple and lapis-blue, tedious, self-sufficient, complacent in their great simplicity. She dominated the world from her balcony, but it was so high up that she felt it sliding away from her, little, untidy, dishevelled incident of civilisation that she was, with no backing, no consequence in these parts. She saw the old road bisecting the new one on the curve of the bowl's rim, grey and straight, like an iron path laid for a switchback. It was Roman, Cecil said. Immediately below her, under the wall so that she could have dropped a powder-puff on its neck, stood the poor old derelict horse, patient as animals are, drooping, spavined, galled, with his red sores glaring up at her from its manger—a heap of rotting straw flung down anyhow. She could not stand it but went in and woke Cecil, saying: "Darling, I do not like this place."

"You *would* come, dear. Why not?"

"It is so—high." She knew it was no use talking to him about the horse.

"Not worse than Switzerland."

"I've never been there. Perhaps that's why I'm so overpowered by this. I feel, ever since we came on that sort of cloud-capped railway, as if I were a pilot in an aeroplane—caught in a pocket of the air, you know—hardly moving—liable to nose down any blessed minute!"

"I," said Cecil, "have my little imaginations too. I fancy I am gone to bed with a nice glass of whisky, on a comfortable, well-stuffed mattress poised in space. That doesn't worry me, for I persuade myself that it is all a matter of imagination, and that I am quite safe—unless I fidget. But otherwise in no more danger than I am in my own bed—and some beds *are* pretty high—that I sleep on quite confidently all the night through and never think of falling off, when one might easily break one's leg—getting out the wrong side."

Lelis did her hair and Cecil shaved, as he said, more by the light of reason than by the looking-glass, and then, seeing no one, they issued forth from their apartment and through the *salle à manger* to the salon opposite where Ò Jù, as Lelis would call her, was "doing" the grate like any English servant. The curtains only were slightly drawn, and of as vile a red as ever by the light of day. They observed that the cushions, placed carefully on the red chairs and pink sofas which Julia had uncovered for their use, were yellow. They sat down stiffly on a cold and glassy chair each and looked about. There were Empire mirrors, a little fly-blown, and a smaller one in a dull frame that Cecil looked even a little excited about.

"Brass?" she said contemptuously.

"Worth fabulous sums," he said. "And the Captain of Gendarmerie will mop it up. Get her to give it you."

There were framed oil paintings which Cecil said were good but nothing much, side by side with photographic reproductions of Queen Victoria and the Shah of Persia and Alexandra with her pendant lock smiling on Napoleon le Grand with his white plaston.

"Look at the Bryant and May's match-box and the silver bell from the rue de Rivoli, put like relics in the place of honour!"

"Perhaps Mamma gave it them. I think we oughtn't—" Lelis began as Julia gathered up her tools and, muttering that she would tell Madame, who had been up all night with Monsieur, who had not been able to sleep but who had now gone out, left the room.

"Matalina is determined to begin with the church," Lelis told him. "Quite modern, I gather, but you must be polite, then perhaps we can get her to tell us things—she's rather shy of giving Corsica away, you know. Pretends that everything is changed since Mamma was here and that they're all as reformed and civilised as you and I. When I asked her to take us to one of those places where a murder has been committed and that Mamma said were all along the road. . . ."

"*Mucchio*. Everyone who passes throws a branch or a stone, and sometimes there is a sort of cross made out of two transverse sticks. . . ."

"Yes, Mamma saw two when she was here. But Matalina sticks to it that there are none and that the Vendetta is all over now."

"That's all nonsense! I read in the *Eveil de Corse,* just before I left Ajaccio, an account of what they are pleased to call a *rixe sanglante* at Olivesa between Paolo Paoletti and Francesco Sarti, who killed Monsieur Dominique Sarti, Cultivateur, because he had refused to carry out a contract to marry a female Paoletti. The scandal was great. The mother of the girl took to drink. It appears that Sarti had taken her daughter for a trial trip, as they still do in Wales, and then sent her back to her family with a child beginning. . . ."

Matalina appeared, dressed *en bonne bourgeoise* out of one of the great Paris stores. She carried an old-fashioned reticule with her monogram, M. M., in gold on it, and wore her large gold filigree earrings that suited her, but not in the daytime.

The street was drier since last night. There was no rain and everybody in Vivario seemed to be out of doors. It was market day. Bells were jangling; a man was playing a concertina against another man who turned a barrel organ. The dancing bear had come on from Bocognano and the children were half pleased, half frightened. One little nervous, pink-pinafored child attracted Lelis very much and she tried to make friends with it.

"*Andemmi, Ó zité!*" In vain; it cried and its black-robed mother rushed forward and clasped it to her so that it looked like a splash of blood all up her breast.

The road widened and they came to a shabby little square with the famous Fountain of Diana in the middle where all the men of Vivario lounged, apparently armed to the teeth, at eleven o'clock in the morning. Each man had his leathern *carchera* slung to his hip and a gun on his shoulder, all except the old Mayor of Vivario, who wore still the pointed cap and red scarf folded many times round his parched neck they had seen him in last night, unarmed. Matalina didn't speak to her husband as they passed him. Cecil said to his wife carelessly:

"They are gossiping about us. Consulting how best to rob and murder us—saying that we must, of course, be millionaires to be able to afford to come here, travelling about for the sake of *agrément.* And see the little cobbler at his bench cobbling away at the boots of these lazy louts, giving them that splendid appetiser —watching somebody else work."

"*Le Scandale! Le Scandale et La Politique, c'est le fléau de La Corse,*" Matalina said, showing that she had understood. She was looking anxiously up a side alley where a little crowd appeared to be gathering. She cried to them suddenly over her shoulder: "*Vite! Vite! Partons!*" and began to walk very fast, jostling her friends Madame Buttafoce and Madame Ciaccaldi, cronies to whom she had just introduced her guests. Cecil, seeing no need for haste, stooped and picked up Madame Buttafoce's parcels for her, whispering to Lelis who helped him: "She is furious with old Pinsuto for wasting his time at the fountain and getting into *rixes!*"

"Why do you call him Pinsuto?"

"They all do. Because he wears that pointed cap. And also Barba-in-Orecchie—Andrew Beard in the Ears—because of the hair sprouting out of them."

They had rejoined their hostess, who was now surrounded by a rabble of boys and girls, led by a stooping, ragged figure of a woman, wild-eyed, vociferating. . . .

Then Matalina turned to them: "*C'est la Folle! O mon Dieu! N'écoutez pas!*" she murmured, while the tall woman, poking her face right under the broad-brimmed hat which the honoured Madame Bonelli was wearing, shouted into her ears words of which Lelis only partly gathered the drift. She seemed to be abusing Matalina . . . calling her by her maiden name, taunting her with her long golden earrings . . . reviling her for entertaining—for taking the hand of the son of a dog. . . . Jacaronel Was there no one in her family who had the courage? . . . What of *le beau Regulus?* . . .

Cecil brushed the woman aside with what seemed a pat of his paw, like a bear, but without hurting her. He took Matalina's arm while Lelis trotted behind, and hurried her into the churchyard by the little swing gate. Out of breath, red as flame, Matalina stood still awhile, crossing herself and murmuring, "*Ne faites pas attention, je vous en prie! C'est la Folle—La Folle de Vivario. . . .*" as if the creature was an institution. Then, crossing herself once for all, she led them away from the gravel path among the more untended graves. She walked unevenly; her long black gown brushing the short grass that grew close up in a stiff fringe round the headstones, prodding as she went with the stick of her umbrella to find one that had evidently been grown over. She said to Lelis over her shoulder once:

"You must go to Bocognano or Sullacaro to find what you want. Here, not. Here in Vivario we are civilised. No murder has been committed here for over a hundred years and never will be again. . . . *Ah, la voici, la pierre funéraire! Lisez, Monsieur le Professeur!*" She spoke with an enchanting smile of fellowship—"And then you will believe what I tell you."

Cecil scraped away the weeds that had nearly covered the block of stone and read with a ceremonious gravity which helped to calm Madame Bonelli, who was still quivering:

"*Maledictus qui percussit clam proximus et dicat omnis populus Amen.* Cursed be he that smites his neighbour and let all the people say Amen. It refers to a Vendetta of the seventeenth century, an awful, memorable, terrible one that came to involve nearly every family in the island—made it into a shambles. People who had never spoken to each other, had not even a bowing acquaintance with each other, espoused a quarrel with which they had not conceivably anything to do, for the sake of pride and bloodthirstiness; the murderer even paying someone else to do his dirty work for him."

Cecil had really done nothing but abuse Corsica and Corsicans since he came. It was becoming a *tic* with him. Lelis did so wish he wouldn't. And always forgetting that Madame Bonelli had spent nearly a couple of years in England and understood a good deal more English than he supposed. She had grasped what he said, and for once his wife was not sorry that Cecil should receive a set-down.

"*Jeune homme*, it is foolish to talk like that, *plutôt offensant* for me that am

a Corsican. Be sure that if one of us was to kill another for money his friends even would give him *rimbecco*, call him Taddunághin. . . . No, no, Cecc' Anton', murders are committed for the sake of punishing a crime that has been committed—for the honour of a family, or for friendship!"

She had called Cecil by his pet name to show she had forgiven him for insulting her. But the Corsican strain was uppermost. Lelis, looking at her clear firm brows and obstinate little nose, felt sure that if she had been a man she would have been up and at him. Cecil would be getting himself killed one of these days if he would not try to show more regard for the feelings of other people.

The zest, if there had been any, had gone out of the walk. They went on a little way down the road that curved so suddenly that they soon found themselves facing Vivario over the valley. Matalina then faintly suggested that they should turn round. Over there, where they were coming in Muracciole, the village, by the collection of sawmills, lived the Pancrazie, her husband's relations, *des gens* with whom she preferred to have little to do. They were *très avares—mêmes méchants*. They did not like her, but were just waiting for Andrea to die, as he must soon, for he was very aged, and then they would come into his money. Yes, their son was the Regulus Andrea had spoken of, *un assez brave garçon*. It was his mother, the *vieille sorcière* that Matalina did not like. But Regulus was *plutôt bien* and very useful to his uncle, managing well his affairs for him since they would so soon be his own. *Tant pis!*

They turned back the way they had come.

"This afternoon," Lelis whispered to him, "we shall be able to go out alone now she has done us proud this morning. We will go *pa li lozzi*—among the rocks and the wild places."

The road to the river where they decided to go lay past the Fountain of Diana, where Andrea Bonelli was standing among his fellow-citizens as usual. He did not even acknowledge them. This reminded Lelis of La Folle, and she begged her husband to tell her what the mad woman had said and why she had made that grab at Matalina's earrings.

"What she said was that she had better have had a gold ring than gold earrings. It was a neat jibe. If Matalina had been a man it was tantamount to giving her *rimbecco*. *Rimbeccare*—to insult you in public, to reproach you for not having avenged a relation—your father or your cousin or brother, or uncle as the case may be. It is the most awful thing you can do to anyone. It is horrible. I watched her nice bourgeoise French face submerge and all the Italian congestions of hate and revengefulness flame up in it for one little moment."

"I only saw her get red."

She was silent, but as they passed under the railway arch to the river of her dreams—she had only heard it moaning—not seen it—Lelis said:

"It was about us, then?"

"I suppose so. What does it matter?"

"Cecil, don't you blame Uncle Horace at all?"

Cecil took no notice. He was off on one of the disquisitions that always in-

terested but somehow offended her. Matalina and the Corsican complex generally she thought was beginning to get upon her nerves. . . .

"Poor Madame Bonelli is, of course, French on one side, but her mother appears to have been pure Corsican peasant. One of those Latin Valkyrie, War maidens, inciters to murder, who keep bloody shirts under their linen chests to remind them—every time they lift it to get a clean sheet—that they are forgetting to jog suitably and often enough their men-kind. I don't suppose you'd ever see it now done properly, but the scenes at the *ghirdato*—the wake—would have interested you. Howling and moaning and posturing, body-gashing and other Sadic rites in a darkened room, all the men sitting round armed to the teeth; cursing low to the women's screeching. These are experts paid a regular fee to do it and give good value in horror. And, when the séance is over and the Voceratrice—or Principal Boy—is lying on the floor in a state of coma, wrapped in her veil, there's the *cunfortu'* to look forward to—a big supper set out in the next room to comfort them before they set off on their gun work. Vociferating is a thirsty job. . . ."

He went on though she said nothing and was in less sympathy with him than usual.

"Ceremonial, you see, is good for the savage soul. Organised murder and full observance of its pleasant formalities acts as a derivative to the emotions, a sort of cupping or letting blood of the Ego, like women's easy tears. It is primarily a woman's occasion and they do it very well—as well as Drury Lane in the old days. The most striking *voceri* get published. Here is one I remember *très faisandée*: *'Oh, if I had a child—I would cut up my bloody apron—to make him a waistcoat.'* And I have heard tell of another Colomba who had a down on the curate who refused to toll the bell for her dead lover, reasonably enough perhaps, since the murderer was the curate's own brother. Listen. *'Oh, Matteo, my pheasant—I would that I had in a basket—The entrails of the curate—That I might take them with my teeth—And feel them with my hands. Excommunicating wretch of a curate—Dog who eats the sacrament—May'st thou burst with suffering.'* Pretty, isn't it?"

"Cecil, how you do seem to hate these people!"

"No. I hate nothing and I hope nothing hates me. I am just an observer."

"I'm not so sure," said Lelis lightly. "I believe old Pinsuto does. I've watched him watching you."

They dropped into the Post Office, which was quite French, to send a letter to Emmeline and tell her what a success Corsica was, and then Lelis enticed Cecil into the scrub, which came nearly up to her chin.

"Is this your famous *maquis*? It's just the ordinary white heather, only taller and better, that they sell in London streets for fourpence a spray and that I wanted to give you, darling, for many and many a long year when you simply wouldn't propose!"

"Little ridiculous thing in a pigtail! Well, you've got me now and got me here, and what more do you want?"

"Kiss me here, in your old *maquis*!"

Cecil embraced her willingly and then they found a waste patch, where the

heather had been burnt, and got easily down to the bottom of the bowl and started to walk along the river bed till they should strike the old Roman road they saw from their window, back to Vivario. It was just like some of the rivers of Yorkshire and Cumberland she had known, only more entangled, more interrupted with every sort of untrammeled growth, so that she was prevented from progressing by the leaps and bounds she used in England. They were, so Cecil informed her, a full hour doing a quarter of a mile, crawling, creeping from one stone to another since there was not room to take off for a jump or stand upright. The hat of Lelis was pulled off her head, her hair caught by straggling boughs that seemed like envious polyps seizing their prey—pale, ashen-grey arms and tentacles. . . . She would not give in or get up on to the bank so near; she set her teeth, put her hat in her pocket, bound up her hair and got on with it, though she had a horrid feeling that the wood, thus spread over a floor of moving water, was bewitched. Cecil, who toiled after her, looked as bewildered as if he had been puzzling out some Greek text—which he would certainly have preferred doing. . . . He was annoyed at her superior progress and begged her several times to stop and wait for him.

"Poor big darling, it's worse for you. You can't possibly get through places I can in the same time. Let me!—it's like the Lion and the Mouse." She pushed a bough away for him. . . .

Then Cecil confessed to being nervous about *her*.

"I pick my way and keep my eyes down for fear they get put out by these twigs, and then the crackling of your feet stops and I get thinking that when I raise my eyes I shall perhaps see you before me caught by your hair in the fork of a bough. . . . Phyllis, hanging for Demophöon."

Lelis fancied herself as the Greek nymph and delighted in a husband who could stand quite still on a slippery stone and quote Chaucer to her. How queer he was! Such a mixture! Then she would stop, console him with a tippy sort of kiss and resume the struggle, fighting her way inch by inch, pushing the woven branches aside, calculating which bough or sapling would give way soonest and which it would be wisest to skirt round; taking into account the pools, some shallow and some deep, some foaming like light beer, others dank and deadly still, like the deep fat they do not begin to cook in till it exhibits a thin, devilish blue flame rising among the brown flakes of grease. What about Malmignatto, the poisonous spider that Ò Jù had told her of? She would have given her life to cut it all and get out on the bank. . . .

"Cecil, it is like the dream I often have," she said when at last they struck the road that would lead them up to Vivario and their dinner. "I dream I am lost in a wood of little trees, with water under them, just like this, and in my dream I'm afraid and realise that I have to get out quick, for the wood is evil."

"Death at the end of the dream, perhaps? But not for you—yet!" he said softly. "The obstructionist maze that life is! . . . It was fighting, fighting all the way, and tree trunks flung in my path like mad. Do you know where that comes from? But here is undoubtedly a mild Purgatory which all of us at least have deserved in the shape of these ruts that the Roman chariots must have dug in the lime-

stone when they were here. They are the exact span of the Roman chariot; just so the English carts are made to-day!"

"All right for the charioteers, but awfully hard for the feet."

"Oh, the feet of the ancients would be so caked with solid dirt that it would act like a sole on which they padded, softly—a mud plaster so hard to get off that kings, eager for votes, set to work to wash subjects' feet to show humility. I am thinking. . . ."

He thought, but all he said was: "Oh, darling, darling!" twice repeated, and he did not speak any more all the way home.

The kid was stickier than usual at dinner and the wine sourer. Matalina scolded Cecil for taking his wife into such places. Why choose *ce sale chemin* when there was a nice new road? *La petite* was exhausted and Matalina would send her to bed early.

Lelis was not so much exhausted as profoundly jarred. Her education was perhaps being taken too fast. Her brain was beginning to be a farrago of Browning parodies, poems of Chaucer, Roman chariots and dirty feet; classical allusions, poetical images and savage philosophy combined with a want of ordinary human sympathy verging at times on brutality.

Cecil! In the end it was! And Cecil it always would be. Cecil was the rough, hairy polyp that was strangling her charity, her faith, her decencies. He was not . . . quite . . . Fancy, she had never once been able to talk to him about the horse agonising there at the foot of their bedroom window! Emmeline had been right. He was like his father . . . cynical . . . heartless. . . .

Frankness itself she was. The poor child put to him when he came up some questions she had framed whose answers, if he did answer them, would explain what was perplexing and agitating her.

But there was more. . . .

"It's the way my mind works," Cecil said. "My brain fastens on some things—not the sort of thing that yours would, though it is a very good mind, dear. . . . But"—he looked at her blearedly—"that isn't what you are put out with me for . . . . I could tell you. . . . Your dear little remarks only signify a Freudian circumlocution."

"Cecil, you irritate me when you will assume that you know what I am thinking of. You've done it before. . . ."

She was decidedly out of temper, a rose dashing its own petals away—down to the dank earth. . . .

He said gravely, drawing a strand of her hair through his fingers: "You are worrying about my father and my attitude towards—what he is supposed to have done."

She got off his knee and flung away to the window. Thence she spoke quietly:

"Cecil, how badly, exactly, did your father behave that time he was here with Mamma? What actual promise did he make?"

"Not badly at all. No promise," Cecil answered. "As a matter of fact this girl

—the one he flirted with—married all right. Matalina is now the honoured wife of the honourable mayor of her native village."

"No, his girl didn't, Cecil. *His* girl was Chilina, who died."

A quality of Cecil's intensive sort of memory was that he remembered only what he intended to remember and put the rest severely away—threw it down the chute of memory and abandoned it in word and deed. He came up to her and kissed her. But it was not enough.

"Well, whichever one it was"—looking up with her peculiar pertinacity, as of a child determined to get to the bottom of the breaking of a doll or the loss of a toy—"if he was keen enough on her to want to induce Mamma to bring her back to England for him, why didn't he marry her when he got her there? Was it because she was an innkeeper's daughter?"

"Perhaps. Perhaps she was too elegant—used her knife too correctly? My father was rather a connoisseur in *la femme*—as I am." He kissed her again. "But in point of fact, either of the girls was far superior to the woman he eventually did marry and who meant all along to get him as soon as she became a widow."

"But Mamma did seem to think that it was Chilina he ought to have made an honest woman of!"

"Don't, don't use that phrase. It has an entirely different connotation; Chilina was chaste."

"They don't seem to think so here. And once, I remember, long after they went back and Chilina would be called *passée*, there was a man who would have taken her but couldn't afford to marry unless he could sell a certain stone quarry he had on his hands. Mamma wrote at once to Uncle Horace and suggested his buying it because it would be a good opportunity of repairing the past—that was her very phrase."

"My dear child, let me tell you that there was actually nothing to repair. Aunt Margaret was only being, as usual, sentimental about things. This is the story as I see it. Those girls were just pining for a little life—not love—that they could get here at home by a humblish local marriage. Father had a *bon mouvement*—he had them sometimes—as well as an eye for beauty which, as he knew and everybody knows, is an asset which makes a woman perfectly independent if she is given half a chance. He gave it them. He suggested to Aunt Margaret that they should both—both, mind you—be taken for a jaunt on his yacht, and perhaps a little further, to Paris. And your mother had taken such a strong fancy to them by then, that or a pitifulness, that she proposed to the guardian to take them all the way back with her and give them a glimpse of the gay world, and she allowed them by way of exchange to pretend to teach you children French. It was a bargain between her and the girls. There was no question of my father at all. He'd somebody in Paris at that time himself. Anyway, he cast them all off at the Gare du Nord, loading them with all these Palais Royal ornaments and knick-knacks we see here, gold chains and necklaces and earrings, and then quietly went back to join his yacht. And do you suppose that old St. Brice, who is at least a gentleman, one of the oldest noblesse, would have come to England and flung his ægis over the whole affair if it hadn't been all right? Just a matter

of money! They were a quite ordinary pair though you have chosen to throw a mantle of romance over them. . . . Weave what tales you like about them, but don't, for God's sake, try to implicate my father, who's got enough sins to his account not to need saddling with the seduction of a Corsican peasant girl, as heartless and selfish as they make them I assure you. They were as glad to get away from this God-forsaken place as I shall be."

She became suddenly mercurial—pert. "Cecil dear, you've just come. Do try to enjoy it as I am doing, every moment of the day. To-morrow I am going to tackle Ò Jù again and get some more out of her. She's very much excited about the Folle. She says Jacarone, or Jaccaccio, means 'great dog,' a term of enormous contempt."

"Yes, all words ending in *accio* are."

"And you should just hear her grizzling! It gets me. Everything nearly is a portent. The crowing of a cock, a dog barking, meeting a troop of pigs—things one does all the time. And a light upon the housetops that you can't account for means the death of a person."

"Ah, the light upon the pillars of the hall of Odysseus when Athene had set on the slaughter. That's rather an interesting one. Any more?"

"What's most awfully frightening is a little drum beaten in the street by a spirit if anyone's death is really decreed. Then the dead themselves come to the house to make it known."

"I believe Julia wants to frighten you and make you want me to take you away."

"Oh, no. She likes us. The idea is that old Barba-in-Orecchie is going to die, and all those dreadful people on the other side of the river down there come in, and poor Matalina will have to lie on the straw."

"We'll take her back to England with us and she shall have charge of the linen cupboard. Darling, don't talk so much to Julia. She upsets you so that you'll be going on your knees for me to take you home. Till then . . ."

He sent her back to her own bed and went to sleep before she had crossed the room, with one look at the tattered flap which she always forgot to ask Julia to see to.

"*Andare, co salute!*" Matalina, looking strangely frail and worn, bade her guests Godspeed as they started for one of their walks *pa li lozzi*, up to the Sommet de la Paille and at least as far as the Genoese tower. It was warm and they were clad as lightly as they could contrive to be. Lelis was bareheaded and swung her flat, local straw hat by the tassel which was its trimming.

"Do you notice," she asked her husband, doing all the talking, for Cecil was always fairly taciturn going uphill—it taxed his chest so, "that when Matalina asked us if it was *Cola* or *Fala* to-day she seemed rather relieved when we said *Cola*. She doesn't seem to approve of *Fala*, down through the village. I don't believe she cares for us to go out alone at all."

"What else can she do? She obviously hates walking herself, and I don't see old Pinsuto leaving his sessions at the Fountain to escort us."

Lelis said, "I don't believe he ever washes or takes that red thing off his neck. He sleeps in his cap for fear he catches cold in his ears, Julia told me."

"My dear, you expect too much of an old brigand—bandit—I beg his pardon. Sleeping in your clothes is a habit you acquire in the *maquis*, when you may be surprised at any moment. And, as for the cap, there are doubtless twenty mortal murders on his crown, so no wonder he prefers to keep it covered up. He doesn't like me and I don't like him. . . . Look here, dear, that beastly Captain Regulus is coming to-night and he'll offer to take you out. I can't stand against the military, so perhaps this is the last walk you and I shall have in peace together and, my word, it is going to be heavenly! I wish that Venus' car with the doves would drive across that azure field and carry me off to her Court. I always did believe she held it on a peak in Corsica and now I know it. And at her beautiful white feet, while the doves that bring her wait in attendance, sit the successful generals, the heroes that were her lovers, on little tufts of moss and asphodel. This is the very place. We will get as near as we can to the top and lie down and hope the car will come and take me." He seemed to walk on in a dream. . . .

"More likely an eagle will mistake me for a kid in my white dress and snap me up. Julia says they do that."

At first the road was almost reassuringly English-looking, hedges on each side, though not of quick-set or trimmed, but composed of laurustinus and arbutus and quite tall prickly pear. Now and again they came across a sickening, writhing mass in the middle of the way—caterpillars fallen in their bags, grown too heavy, from the boughs of the trees and mangled and crushed to death by their own weight. . . .

Higher and higher, till the little cortège of obsequious children that always accompanied the first stages of their walks crying, "*Sou! Sou! Inglese!*" and offering the tiniest of nosegays made of wild flowers to the lady, which Lelis bought and lost immediately as one loses a pin, dropped off, tired of following them.

She began to experience again the awful feeling which had visited her the morning after their arrival, of having risen too high as it were for her own ballast, like a sort of escaped balloon.

They had not met a single human being since the children of Vivario had left them. The English road suddenly ended and they turned, in a flash, how they knew not, there was no gate, no worldly gradation, into regions *pa li lozzi* indeed, into one of the wild, unconfined places of the world where goats alone, with their nimble black feet, scrambled and skipped and fed. And high—so high that it hurt! . . .

They stopped and stood attentive, a little way from each other. They were almost alienated from each other by the stately, airy grandeur that made them paltry and their great love inconsiderable. They were intoxicated with still, cold ether so that they hardly knew what they were or felt; the air was so heady it seemed to make them want to leap from this half-mile or so of green sward that was actually the top of a huge mountain across to one of the other mountains, just as high, rising round them on all sides: the width of the ravine that divided, only half betrayed by the film walls of haze between.

Cecil said softly: "You won't believe me, but I was made for a hermit. I could live happy here—yes—for a hundred or so of years, and wait for Venus to fetch me."

What did it matter—the vain and conceited things her Cecil said? This was the pole, the hub of the universe. They were both, for the moment, supernal beings. Now to her, his pretty notion of the Goddess of Love, holding her Court on a flowery mound surrounded by her *fidèles*, Paris, Hector, Tristan and all the great lovers of the world, seemed conceivable enough, only, disappointment here as on earth, she saw no profusion of spring flowers on a velvety sward breaking into violet and crocus flames, only the withered bells of asphodel, so dry that they positively tinkled under her little, softly-stepping foot. Since she had been in Corsica—and yet it was spring—she had never seen the pretty flowers her mother had told her of—it was either too early or too late for them, perhaps? Where was the red and silver cytisus—the common weed of Corsica—the goldy-brown lavender, the coronella and the cyclamen? Here was nothing but short, close herbage, cropped clean; dry and discoloured, like Sappho's love-ravaged cheek. And it was April!

They abandoned the idea of the Genoese tower, which they thought they faintly descried about half a mile away by the difference of colour—it was like a spaniel dog squatting against the rock—to the south.

"Don't let us bother—this is so beautiful!" Cecil said, and they sat down and began to consider the ways of cohorts of large, black, shiny beetles that Lelis did not mind, somehow, out here as one would in a London kitchen, for they looked so clean and so smart. Kneeling down the lovers watched the beetles endeavouring to make their own, and carry away to their families in the cleft of some tiny tussock of grass, the little black balls left by the ghosts. Before long both were absorbed in this amusement, each selecting a beetle and racing it. They wanted to see how soon their respective insects would, pushing it with their heads, try to negotiate a lump as large again as themselves up a long and weary road that represented a mountain, oft stumbling and forced to let go and begin all over again from the bottom.

"What on earth does the beetle want it for?" Lelis asked and, for once, Cecil, his restless ego lulled and pacified by the soft sweet, ambient sunlight that flowed in all round him, did not hasten to inform her. He lay on his side and she did too. She could half see, against the wire-drawn blue upon blue of the sky, the eagles circling. . . . They were foraging, like the beetles, for their daily bread, and so cruel over it, with horrible forked talons and hooded eyes! She feared to see one of the darling little kids, frisking and caracoling with that peculiar, irresponsible movement of theirs, all round them, seized by the slack of its back and borne uncomplaining to the obscene lair, away there in the pathless, trackless waste of green.

The idea quite took possession of her. The rotundity of her own hip as she lay prone must be awfully conspicuous on this rounded height, as if offered actually for acceptance. Might not, she timorously asked Cecil, giggling but

afraid—might not an eagle, espying her, imagine her to be his proper prey? Cecil laughingly replied that such would probably be her fate. No beautiful, amorous goddess stooping from a golden car for her, Lelis, just a modern English girl, a unit of no particular value, as Cecil had often told her, who could practise no arts of any sort, do nothing but love! . . .

Cecil, that cruel, mysterious, fascinating genius, ill to do with, hysterical, babyish, weak in certain ways, was for the moment as happy as she had ever seen him. He was not even thinking of her except perhaps kindly, as a child whom he had taken for a walk. He adored children. Perhaps in his inward soul, tortuous but sincere, he was actually hoping to be carried off to her own domain by the goddess, wishing to have some such glorious ending to his life as might befall a poet—for a man must get tired always of observing, never feeling. . . . Only she knew his one regret, if the car of the Queen of Heaven were really to come, would be, not that he was leaving her, but that he would not be there to write about it, illumine the world with the glory, the style of his translation.

Cecil remained rapt and she became very violently bored . . . she so hated long silences. Cecil was drinking it in . . . enjoying it . . . but alone, selfishly. Surely their enjoyment of a scene like this should be mutual and his pleasure not cause him to neglect her so? She thought she would try to talk to him, to enter into communication with him somewhat on the lines of his own thoughts.

Poetry? . . .

"Cecil," she began, pettishly and, stung by her tiny lash, he turned over like a large obedient lamb, kissed her and turned back again, hiding his face, laying his golden crown on the pillow of his two arms.

"Cecil, last night Ò Jù sang, or rather recited, to me part of the very *vocero* that a famous local poetess had composed and sung herself at the funeral of her cousin and schoolfellow, Chilina Maymart."

"Oh, do let me . . ." Cecil began. Then, as he was kind and adored her, he raised his head from this reverie, coupled with the soothing study of the efforts of his beetle and said: "Yes. Can you recite it to me, dear?"

"Not quite all—some. Chili's funeral was a most wonderful affair, Ò Jù says. People came from miles round. Old Madame Pancrazie carried on dreadfully, threatening to dye herself with lampblack—"

—"Resinous wood they get somewhere down in Asco that will warm you and light you as well as dye you. Go on, dear. What was done at Chilina's funeral?"

"The women, Ò Jù and Matalina and Annadea Pancrazie," Lelis began, delighted to be allowed to tell Cecil something, "first washed her face and braided her hair and folded her hands in front, all tied with ribands, and put a bouquet there and a bridal wreath on her head and her tiny little French shoes, that had cost a lot, on her feet. And then they laid her on a table in her shroud and lit tapers and the priests came, and after that they prayed all night. And at dawn they put her out, table and all, in the front of the house and everybody came to say good-bye—"

"I know. Old professionals, mopping and mowing like the witches in *Macbeth* —pointing at vacancy—pretending to smell blood—*Di Sangue Sentù!* . . ."

"It was not a murder, only a young girl that had died, so there was none of that. It was Chilina de Carcheto of Orrezza, her own cousin, who said the *vocero* for the Snowdrop of Vivario."

"A very brown snowdrop, if I remember. Well, give me the poem—what you remember of it."

"Ò Jù gave it me to read, but I've rather forgotten it. But Chilina de Carcheto's idea was to assume that Chili was not really dead and that if you talked at her long enough you might persuade her to get up. They scolded her, even. . . . I can't remember, but it was something like this: *O my cousin with the lovely hands*— They made a great deal of her pretty hands and her spinning and her skill in needlework. You know mother had dozens of pillowcases that you've slept on embroidered with our initials that Chili made. Emmeline has some of them now. Well, they set to work to praise her and beg her to rise—and go to Carcheto and be married . . . think of that! But, of course, she doesn't move, and the cousin is very cross with her—pretends to be. Look at her this morning, she says how cruel she has become! *Once a sugared almond—Now she is as bitter as gall* . . . and so on. But she never moves and they give it up and let her go. You'd think after all this praise they'd send her to Paradise, but no, she seems to have to pass through a sort of Hades place, for they say: *The place where Chili has to go—There the sun never shines—There they never light a fire. . . .*"

"Hades, as you say. Purgatory the Christians make it. Go on, dear. It's very nice."

"But why Purgatory for Chili? Was it because she was supposed to be wicked, or not quite good—something she had done to make God want to keep her in a half-way place till she had been just a little punished? I hardly think they can have thought ill of her—in that way. For one verse was: *The young men of the neighbourhood—In her presence—Were like lighted torches—But full of reverence*. Cecil, don't you think that idea poetical?"

"Well, it's what our ancestors would have called Gothic. Barbarous ideas rough hewn—a mixture of passion and superstition—like that Norse stuff I hate. The terrible rugged Sagas! . . . Even recited in your pretty little voice it is, to me, out of keeping with the clearness and distinction of this mountain top."

"But, Cecil, my dear, don't you see the pathos—the feeling in it?"

"I don't value feeling unless subordinated to purposes of art."

Lelis, her wits cleared and freshened by the inspiring air, her moral sense, that was, after all, founded so surely on the teaching of the years of her orphan tutelage, strongly alert, stood up to him.

"But this does. I know what you mean. You've taught me to think, Cecil, and it comes back on you. All this that we have somehow got into, till I can hardly sleep at night for thinking of it, is just like a story, and a very sad one as I see it, and it's one of which our family—we are all De La Gardes, remember, and fled from our native country for our Faith once, so we ought to be moral—we are all to blame. It *was* a crime, what Uncle Horace did, and my mother helped him to—let us call it transplanting these girls from their home."

"You may call it a rape if you like. A cruel eagle, swooping down on a young kidlet—two young kidlets—and flying off with them to his lair for the quite ordinary purpose of eating them. Jupiter, in the form of an old, stoutish millionaire with a well-appointed yacht—a pleasanter mode of conveyance, surely, than a bull's back—taking off two complaisant Europas, with a chaperon thrown in, all the way to England. There's nothing to feel guilty about, my darling. They were, as far as I can see, entirely mean, heartless and frivolous; they just loved money and comfort and fine clothes and nice food, and there was going to be plenty of that and the chance of a good marriage into the bargain. Believe me, they were delighted to be raped."

"Ah, but not to be sent back again, disgraced, without a wedding ring between them, only a few old wages of sin in the shape of a bag with a gold monogram and a pair of earrings *en toc*. I've had them in my hand and they're not real. And what's worse, a set of new, luxurious habits that they'd never have a chance of gratifying without him, and then off he went and married and they were returned to their mother, like lost luggage that has been wandering for a year! I think that smart salon is pathetic! The broken-hearted mother furnishing apartments for her returned prodigals—regardless! Doing what she could to find them husbands, and Uncle Horace didn't even help by buying the stone quarry at Vezzani that would have made it possible, for one of them at least. They must have seemed to their mother like changelings when they came back, soured and disappointed —not married, which is all that sort of person thinks of. The mother said mildly in a letter to Mamma that they were *plutôt changées* and that *les pauvrettes* could no longer put up with their poor home and their shabby working mother, and turned against the food that was all she could afford to give them. I believe it was what killed her; she only lived to forty-eight and she was a fine, healthy woman, Sir Frederick said. And they—they were practically dead too. Rather hard, don't you think, to be dead at twenty-four and, what is worse, ill thought of, so that when Chili died even her best friends thought she was not fit for Heaven—only Purgatory! Cecil, you *must* feel."

"You *shall* feel!" Cecil said, mimicking her, "——Father's sins, too!" He spoke still from under his crossed arms, watching a beetle. . . . "Well, I suppose I shall be the one to suffer for them. I have always, all my life, suffered for the faults or aberrations of others. This crocky chest of mine—if my father hadn't been the sort of man you make him out to be, I suppose I should have escaped the doom of bronchitis—that'll finish me."

He turned his face to her. "Darling, that was quite a neat tirade of yours—you're going to grow into a wonderful woman! Yes, that's a compensation: I've got you and you're enough to make up for everything I've missed, and nearly as much as I deserve. . . . Darling, I can say that I came to this place to please you and gave you the chance of scolding me here, on the very Hill of Venus! I have been patient. Count that to me, dear."

He got up heavily. "I'm so tired of that beetle. He keeps on slippery-sliding down and down and down again—like me. He'll never do it—nor shall I!"

He was alluding to his writing, Lelis knew, rather above people's heads. He got up. He looked rather flushed, as if the blood had gone to his head. . . .

But he loved her. For on the top of this lonely peak, with everything falling away, as it were, all round, he embraced her with a fervour she had never before noticed in him. He was changed. . . . A male Undine, perhaps . . . ?

Reeling almost, with their mutual violence, they stood for a moment staring at and gloating on each other. . . .

Presently, hand in hand, they walked to one of the edges of the half-mile or so of level green sward that Cecil insisted on calling the Hill of Venus, and looked across, their eyes bleared by emotion, at the peak opposite, whose crown was on a level with their eyes grown practised in grandeurs of scale so that they were aware that there might be nearly a mile between the two terrific precipices that the Gravona, in its gorge divided.

"The mountains are like animals dressed up in green *pilone*," she said in a voice that trembled, huddling against him in the sudden fear that beset her lest she or he should fall off the end of the world. She was a little light-headed, bewildered and broken by the violence of their coming together, the strength and fervidness of her husband's embrace—so like a parting one. All that had gone before was nothing; in their union that had lasted for thirty days she had never known such perfect bliss and absolute communion. How she was going to love him! A man who could kiss her like that!

Though Cecil appeared fairly calm, stoical as ever, she knew that he was not calm. He began to talk, exaggerating a little more than usual. Statistics to cover emotion! How like him!

"That green mantle that you speak of is just the tufted tops over—old, old trees—over four hundred years old, some of them, on the Torre di Vizza-Vona, red pines, with their trunks kept raw by the pushing and shoving of battalions of younger ones, growing against each other, in the endeavour to get up to the sunlight, every tree pushing and thrusting at every other tree, getting entwined in hideous embraces, foes for life or locked in death. You've seen Landseer's brutal picture of the two dying stags with horns intertwisted. . . . And on the top it looks just like a calm green sea without waves, for all the commotion, like a heavy ground swell at sea, that goes on underneath continually, livelier, fiercer, spring by spring as now. There's not room for any large animal to rove in it or for a man to stand upright; some bough would intercept and strangle him in a moment's march. It's left to the trees to fight it out. I dare wager that there's not a habitation, a hut, not a human being within a dozen miles or so, except behind us on the Vivario side."

"What about a shelter for bandits?"

"It would be inconvenient for a bandit to hide himself there, even if he could manage to breathe because he couldn't see anyone coming."

"No one could get to *him*, then," said Lelis, who was recovering.

And, as she spoke, a thin, breathing spiral of blue smoke out of the shoulder of the mountain opposite peered courageously, crept out slowly, gathering strength gradually. . . . They stood together, petrified, she: he like one survey-

ing an apparition that boded no good. . . . She was outraged, averse, maddened by the sudden publicity.

"Who? Who?" she moaned. "There is someone there! You liar, Cecil! We weren't alone. . . . They've seen us!"

Cecil, like a mere man in the street, caught hold of her and maintained her stoically lest she fell. Yet he was bewildered by her agony, deafened by her shrill, ugly scream, her useless cry for help—against him—that faded away in the unregarding silence just as the symbolic burst of smoke that had upset her so, dissipated itself on the wide, free air.

They were not done with it. His quiet eyes and her terrified ones watched more smoke come . . . heartier . . . firmer . . . more opaque . . . till at last it was a column that belched fire, a sturdy yellow flame flashing out of its pale purple aura. . . .

"Take me away, Cecil. Quick! You must run. . . ."

He obeyed her.

Lelis got over her fright when they descended the mountain, but Cecil, quiet but secretly flustered, was not happy for the rest of the day. He was put out as well by what Madame Bonelli told them at lunch, a meal where, for once, old Barba-in-Orecchie, still retained by his club at the Fountain of Diana, was not present. Lelis ate better without the sight of his red twisted neckcloth and greasy cap, which, she said, always deprived her of appetite.

Matalina said that her husband *avait des affaires*—some legal business which had cropped up suddenly and which was rather too much for him *à son age*. He had sent a telegram to his nephew, Regulus, who happened to be staying with *les siens* at Muracciole, to come over at once and assist him.

Cecil said, to say something:

"I shall show him my gun and tell him all about the moufflon I have *not* shot."

This was because he was rather hurt with Matalina for what she had said when they told her about the smoke coming out of the hill. Unable to gather from the vague descriptions of Lelis, in which Cecil did not help at all, of the locality of the smoke burst she had hinted that perhaps Monsieur had deceived himself about the thickness of the trees—that the *calibre des arbres* varied a good deal and that there were clearings, perhaps, in the mountain haze not distinguished very well? . . .

She called him, to-day, *Monsieur*, Lelis noticed, instead of Cecc' Anton', or N'ton, to which further pitch of intimacy she had risen. Indeed Matalina appeared queerish altogether; sad, grave, *rentrée*.

She did not rise to it at all when Cecil, as a result of his wife's lecture, did his best to be nice to her and wantonly suggested that she should pack her things and come back with them to England on a visit.

"*Puaretta!*" she said once for no apparent reason, looking at Lelis. It was a sort of turning of the tables. Mrs. Cecil De La Garde and the invalid wife of an inconsiderable Corsican Mayor! Why should Matalina commiserate her, Lelis

thought? And after lunch, when Cecil had gone to his room to write, but really to lie down, she slipped out to the kitchen, told Julia and asked her bluntly why Madame had pitied her.

"You are very young," Julia said, "and he—he is older, and it is not natural. . . . *Perdona.*"

Lelis then felt the necessity to convince this old servant, a woman she would never see again, for really she didn't much like being here, of her happiness with Cecil, his suitability, his goodness, how her very life depended on him and how, some day, she hoped to have a little child.

"*Pour le venger,*" the old woman said, as if in spite of herself. Then: "Ah, it will never end."

It never could, she said. Men were so savage. Ah, why had not Cecc' Anton' been born a Corsican, and then Lelis would have had to live in Vivario and old Julia would have held her baby in her arms. . . . She wished that Lelis would not go these long walks, so far away from the village. . . . The other day, when she came up from the river, she had looked as if she had met a ghost. It was really not safe. Would Lelis give the old woman a promise? . . .

"But, if my husband wills it?" the young wife answered.

"Then if Madame cannot promise I must give Madame a charm that I got from the *strega,* Maria of Calamiccia last Christmas Eve—very powerful. I got it then —it is well always to have a charm against *la mala morte. Salute a noi!* Or the bite of the Malmignatto that crawls in the heather down in the valley. Could Madame persuade Cecc' Anton' to wear it?"

Lelis was sure she couldn't persuade her husband to wear anything in that line. She asked Julia what had upset Madame Bonelli at lunch and why was old Monsieur Bonelli sending for his nephew?

"*Ce n'est rien!*" the old woman answered contemptuously. "*Une rixe* at the Fountain."

"I knew it," said Lelis.

"It is true Pietro Nungiola insulted Bonelli, but what can he do? He is so old."

"Pietro Nungiola gave him *rimbecco,* eh?" She was afraid, after she had blurted this out, that she had hurt Julia's Corsican susceptibilities, but Julia nodded, adding: "It is not for him, *ce vieux!*"

The dinner which ensued was nearly as dull and disagreeable as Cecil predicted it would be. Matalina had the migraine and did not exert herself to distribute the honours of the conversation between the two young men, as her position as hostess might have enabled her to do. Monsieur le Capitaine Regulus Pancrazie was pert and pedantic and contradicted Cecil, herself and his aunt indiscriminately, as inferior persons will, when justified by facts in doing so. Cecil's scrupulous politeness scarcely masked his intolerance that flashed out now and then in a scholastic but insinuating insolence contemptuously adapted to the understanding of the other.

Lelis tried her best. When Matalina led them all back into the warmly coloured but chilly salon, Lelis asked them if they would like her to dance for

them. She was a pupil of the most famous ballet-master of the day and she knew that Cecil, at least, loved to see her do it.

The table was moved on one side and she performed. The obvious and freely expressed admiration of Regulus Pancrazie aggravated Cecil's ill temper. She could see that he even resented the deep, long gaze, the almost insane consideration which old Andrea from his chair near the fireplace gave to the queer postures and gestures assumed one after another, by the beautiful lithe young woman, of which in all his long life he had probably never seen the like. Lelis did not mind his senile stare. She liked Andrea better than she had ever liked him before and, as for Captain Regulus, she was used to the gambollings of immature puppies of any nationality round women who were not for them. Presently, graceful even in her calculated gestures of weariness, she dropped down beside the young man on the blue and pink beaded sofa uncovered for the occasion, and set to work to give him a chance to placate her particular owner. He must know *something* about Corsica that Cecil didn't know. She framed her questions with a view to gaining information that might somehow or other be of use to Cecil, though not for the Life of Cromwell, of which he was by way of writing a chapter every morning, dictating it to her.

But Cecil frowned when she flightily asked Regulus what he thought about the national habit and its bearing on Corsican politics. The young Corsican answered coldly, as indeed all of them did, that it existed no longer. Changing the subject very obviously he asked Madame what monuments she had seen—the Birthplace at Ajaccio—the house of Gaffori—had his aunt shown her L'Inzecca?

"L'Inzecca?" Matalina murmured in a way that excited Lelis, "L'Inzecca!" as if it were somewhere far away and yet important—the resort of some terrible form of dragon which it was almost death to meet; "I have never been there myself. *C'est plutôt terrifiant.*"

Her nephew interrupted her smartly.

"*Du tout! C'est magnifique.* I see that I must myself take Madame De La Garde there, some day in my new *carriole.*"

And Lelis found herself engaged to go with him, some day—Cecil also, of course, or so she took it. She thought that Cecil really ought to see this famous place, the dreadfully deep and long defile over three kilos in length, so Regulus said, through which Fium' Orbe, the Blind River, flows sightless and dumb till it comes to Kyrie and Christeleison guarding Ghisone, on the side of Monte Calvi. Then, irritated by obstruction, it tosses its churned up rage in foam to the very tops of the twin peaks, and splashing the road cut in the limestone halfway down that is propped on wooden balks, the slats projecting a good yard or so over the river, so that walking along and looking down one can see the water below.

"*Bien, Madame, c'est convenu.* I return the day after to-morrow to take you there."

Matalina interposed: "No, Regulus, it is not safe. The parapet is, I hear, broken in three places. It was never mended properly where the cart and horses

of Pe' Ciaccaldi went over last year. He had got the trees too far across and they swung out at the turn and brushed away the wall. He was drowned."

"The fool was sitting swinging his legs out over the stream as they will do. They are careless like that and, of course—" A shrug, "*Cela arrive quelque fois.*"

"*Même souvent!*" Matalina said determinedly. "Do not seek to persuade her, Regulus. I forbid it."

"But," said Lelis, "we shan't have an absurd load of tree trunks and be sitting on the end of them swinging our legs out, so we shall be all right. I shall engage Monsieur to drive very carefully."

"Madame, you have courage!" old Barba-in-Orecchie said suddenly, looking up from his place. She was quick to see the admiration in the glance he gave her, like a fire that flickers long and searchingly before it goes out. Poor old boy! He looked ill, she thought, and full of good-will to them all. She bade Cecil go up and fetch his gun and show it to the Captain.

She fetched it. Cecil seemed disinclined to show the gun or perhaps merely disinclined to move.

"*Eh, bien, Monsieur,*" Regulus said, when he was told the price Cecil had paid for his gun, "*eh bien, vous l'avez pas volé.* That old man, Saverio—I know him—he knew what he was about. Inglesi? Cheat them! is his motto. This weapon is no good for shooting game, which I presume was Monsieur's purpose in buying it? And there is no moufflon nearer than Asco, and perhaps not there —very scarce. I counsel you to ask Dominique Saverio to refund you the money when you pass again through Ajaccio on the return journey."

He sat with his legs jauntily crossed by the round table on which the light of the lamp reached hardly as far as the edge, fingering the new gun that he had very deliberately laid down on it. Occasional gleams from the fire played fitfully on the shiny barrel and on the Captain's polished, yellow, rather Napoleonic face, the nose and profile strongly set out in the fairly constant flickering of the flame and the tall shadows grouped all round waiting to fall in. So Lelis oftenest saw his side face as he talked although he was looking at her—very much looking at her. He was trying to get up a flirtation and Cecil thought so too, for he was sitting all scrunched up, his arms folded tightly across his chest as he always wore them when something which good breeding prevented him from openly resenting occurred to vex him. He was not going to let this little military grasshopper think that he was afraid of his wife with him!

Lelis thought the gun, that cruel, slim, slinking thing, not unlike the Captain in his tightly buttoned, well-made uniform. He was the first Corsican she had seen who was not wearing the arcana of death at his side. Perhaps it was Corsican manners to unsling your cartridge belt in the evenings—or, he had a knife!

No! She and Cecil would *not* go with him in his *carriole* to L'Inzecca. A lunge with it! . . .

Andrea seemed deeply interested in Cecil's acquisition. "*Calibre très étroit,*" he kept repeating in the course of his mutterings that no one seemed to take any notice of.

The Captain went on talking, glaring slyly at her and fingering the weapon lovingly the while. The young girl, distressed by his egregious admiration, was also obsessed by an absurd notion that there was some sort of sympathy between Cecil and his new gun. For every time the young officer's long, thin hand, tipped with well-kept nails, slid adroitly down the length of the *étroit calibre* and back again, her husband's body seemed to wince as if someone touched, somewhere on it, a secret sore. It was nerves. Poor Cecil was not used to firearms. He was no sportsman and that made him thoughtful about the more serious uses that guns might be put to besides the providence of game for the table. He should not be worried. She said, hardly prettily and quite peremptorily, to the Captain, "Give it me!" and then, to cover her *brusquerie*, set to work to play the baby. With her fair hair and blue eyes she could, *à ravir*. Setting the heavy gun down on the table with a bit of a clatter she covered it with one hand, looking by stealth to see if Cecil minded *her* touching it. . . . He did not seem to.

The Captain, on the other side of the table, was looking at Cecil too and his sneer for Cecil and his possessive eyes for her maddened the young bride. She pretended she could not master the trick of opening the gun so as to look in at the sort of hinge where it parted asunder in the middle. Both men smiled at her efforts. Of course, she knew how to open it! But she was irritated by them. She would be silly—sillier if she chose—and she peered elfishly up the barrel as if it was an opera glass.

"It just fits—"

"*—les beaux yeux de ma mie,*" was the Captain's offensive interjection. She went on, to cover his insolence, not worth resenting, feeling that she had better not work Cecil up to be rude to him—

"Like the rim of a *lorgnon*, isn't it, Matalina? *Drôle de lorgnon* for a lady, the barrel of a gun!"

"There have been men, Madame," the young man said gravely, "who have spent the best part of their lives looking down the barrel of a gun—*braqué* on them for seven years, like Pe' Juan Vescovato—you have heard of him?—and it got him at last."

"Yes, I know that story—" Lelis began, but Madame Bonelli interrupted: "*Laissez donc*, Regulus. I don't like it. You are trying to frighten the child and give her *des cauchemars*."

"Yes, I think I will go to bed," Lelis, hearing herself called a child, said piteously. A long shiver went all down her body. She put a finger on the gun of which she was now desperately afraid with the unselfish idea of carrying it upstairs with her. But Cecil made a face at her. Of course it was too heavy. He must bring it.

She always did go first, as a matter of fact. She looked shy and adorable. The young man hastened to escort her to the door and open it for her. A rush of cold air met her; then a man's hot breath. . . . She escaped across the *salle*, holding her hand to her face.

In their room the window was open and the wind was making the canvas ceiling wave and billow. There seemed a perfect hurricane up in the place above.

It was full of flapping, empty noises. Cecil's hideous, uncanny Velarium—harbouring not butterflies but bats, not yellow but dun, blotched and pock-marked with flies' feet, not really dirty but seeming so—weighed upon her as if Hell, that she deserved for her first infidelity, instead of Heaven was falling over her head. She was but a sinner. She wished Cecil would be quick and come. He couldn't be very happy down there?

All Cecil said when he did come was, "Hullo! The wind seems to be getting up? And the Captain is coming back to-morrow. Two things I hate!"

She kept to her own bed this night and Cecil went to sleep at once, as he always did when he was cross. It had that effect on him and he woke always from these hard-bitten sleeps as if nothing had happened. But she lay listening to the sound of talking that came from the *salle à manger*. Old Andrea seemed to have wakened up. She fancied it was his voice predominating:

"Je saurai bien . . . m'arranger . . . avec . . . Un tel . . ."

Or was that the hateful Regulus speaking? It was no use trying to make out. Then she remembered that Cecil hadn't brought up his gun after all, and perhaps the Captain, who so loved it, might be arranging to carry it off? She did not choose to risk his seeing her in her attractive undress even if she had dared to go across the *salle* to the salon and fetch it.

The men's voices, now raised, now grumbling, showed they were still at it. . . . *Une rixe*? They were always having *rixes*, these people! But not, at any rate, a *rixe sanglante*, for uncle and nephew were obviously in the best of relations.

The voices suddenly ceased, and she was so tired that the wind did not keep her awake. She slept. Julia, when she came in with their breakfast in the morning, remarked:

"*Soyez content*. He is gone."

Lelis worried a little over the *contentement* that she was supposed to have. Had Julia seen? In her pink *douillet* peignoir affronting the grey of a cold and windy morning she pursued Julia into the kitchen where she stooped over the tall pot propped on a brazier in which she seemed to do all her cooking, though Madame used a smart Belgian stove. Lelis sat down on the lowest rung of the ladder in the corner, with her peignoir grouped in folds under her to keep the cold away, and began:

"Ò Jù, tell me something."

Julia, melting some bacon in some butter, the foundation of her stew that was to make Cecil rather ill—it could not be helped, they were guests—looked up, and it may have been the result of stooping over the brazier, but her parchment cheeks were almost pink and she looked happy. Strange, thought Lelis, that anyone should look happy in this wild, cold, windy, out-of-the-world place where modern beastliness yet had made its way. The Capitaine had tried to kiss her in the passage last night, as she left the room, and had partially succeeded in buffeting her cheek and she had not yet dared to tell Cecil and, of course, she would never think of telling Matalina for decency's sake. But that was why she had been short with Cecil last night, because she did not like to let him kiss her so soon without knowing, and as she had given no reason, Cecil now was

cross and asleep. She thought she would stop with old Julia for a bit and leave Cecil to miss her when he woke—again. Julia was, on the whole, the person she liked best here. She asked her boldly what had been done about the *rixe* at the Fountain? Was it settled?

Julia got up, leaving her stew simmering on the brazier thing, and answered Lelis as one recalled from thoughts of a pleasant solution of a difficulty to the rehearsing and necessary details of it.

"Regulus is gone to Muracciole to see his mother, who is still alive. He told Andrea before he left to think no more about it, and that if Pietro Nungiola repeated his words, *qu'il aurait affaire à lui et qu'il saurait bien s'arranger d'un tel. . . .*"

The words she had heard through the wall!

Julia continued: "All will be well." She made the sign of the Cross. "Everything has now arranged itself. Madame knows now, and I too know, for Madame has condescended to tell me. Chili herself came to the bedside of Madame in the night and said: "*O ma sœur chérie,* lament for me no more, for I now have the certainty that I shall be among the Blessed." Madame had not answered though her heart bled and her body was nearly torn asunder, for everyone knows that if you answer a spirit you die. "*Mais Madame en est tout renconfortée,* this morning, and she is going early to the church to put flowers on the grave of Chilina, which duty she had neglected lately, and to pray *longuement* for the young Madame and her *maritu* and for the *fiddola* to come."

Lelis blushed, even before the old woman, who went on eagerly:

"And, Madame, when you leave us, as this tells me you soon will"—she had in her hand what appeared to be the bone of some animal, warm, smooth and oily, on which she pretended to be able to foretell the future—"the left shoulder-blade, Madame, for the right deceives. And so, Madame, when you go back to your own country you will tell your friends and relations that we Corsicans are *des braves gens* who forgive their enemies and pray for them."

Lelis took very little notice of Julia's recommendation. She was aghast at what Chilina's ghost had revealed in her speech to her sister, or rather, their idea of her present circumstances. So then, her own people, her sister and her nurse, still imagined Chilina weeping and waiting in Purgatory for her sin. And the words, full of the ancient, ineluctable passion of her race with which old Julia, returning to her stew, dismissed her were like a smouldering menace, a fire that a little stoking would lash and cause to flare up again.

Julia spoke: "*Qui se venge se purifie mais, aussi, je veux bien croire,* he who knows how to forgive. Madame says that and that now Andrea will go straight to Paradise when he dies. . . . Go out now, *pa li lozzi*—to the river—where you will."

Matalina sent them a message to say she feared she had caught a cold in church that morning but hoped she would be well enough to see them later, and would they *faire une belle promenade.*

They obeyed her listlessly. They had been in the island exactly five days and

already its wild charm had worn off: its horror grown on them. Lelis could not be persuaded by Cecil, who hated going uphill, to go down again to the river, dark at noonday, its encumbered bed crossed and crossed again with malign growth of trees. She would go any way except there or past the Fountain; she could not bear the sight of the old man standing there abusing people, making mischief, getting himself insulted. . . . So they wandered up the English-looking road, not meaning to go very far because it was windy. Lelis tried to take an interest in the black kids gambolling up and down the funny little gardens made up on rows of terraces without walls, in which the villagers carried on a sort of intensive cultivation. She made incursions on them as usual with a view to tempting some little black kid or other to come and speak to her. But it annoyed Cecil, this morning.

"You must not," he said. "It upsets me, if you don't mind. . . . You don't understand these people a bit for all your confabs with that disgusting old Julia. Some one of them might shoot you at sight, interfering with their gardens . . . treading down the soil . . . you really can't behave here as if you were at home."

The lingering intonation he laid on the last two words struck her. She returned demurely to the path and put her hand in his:

"Cecil, I sometimes wonder if you like being here—much? . . . Do you do it for me?"

"Of course I do, darling, and that's doing it for myself. But I own that I see red here—not in the ordinary sense of the term but literally! . . . I detest the universal note of red that is everywhere! In the children's frocks—that dreadful crude hot pink, like blood newly spilled. In the chestnuts, old, caked on, but live —crying for revenge—"

"Or like the man's bloody shirt in the lid of the box that is left to remind them."

"You delight in the *macabre*, darling, as an intelligent schoolmistress might," Cecil said, righting himself. "I sometimes think you go out of your way to give yourself a *frisson*. You talk of the poor horse standing in the straw under the balcony and then say, quite seriously, that you have to lean out on purpose to see it!"

"Even if I don't look out I know it's there all the time, and that comes to the same thing. Lifting its poor front leg—and all those patches on its back that mean sores and that get larger and larger every day. Its bones seem to be coming out of its skin. I asked Matalina, and she says it belongs to the Buttafoce and has nothing to do with her. . . ."

"Poor brute! It's got no soul—like its masters. They've no souls and no nerves —and no smelling-bottles! Pouah!"

He drew a long breath as they passed the usual heap of writhing caterpillars on the road:

"But, what I really mean is, although you are kind-hearted and feel for animals, you have no projective imagination. Now I—I have heard so much of it all lately—your Vendetta stunt and all—that I swear I never go out these days without feeling a knife in my back!"

"Oh, Cecil!"

"Yes. It's perhaps indigestion. I'm always faintish with that eternal, sticky, greasy kid we have to eat and those awful homemade wines—"

"But you like the honey, Cecil?"

"—That the poor thing gets for us all the way from Ajaccio. We are putting her, you know, to a great deal of expense—one way and another. I fancy they live much more simply when they are alone."

"Cecil—do you think—that we are perhaps outstaying our welcome?"

"I think she would be rather relieved if we begin to talk about going, one of these days, soon."

Lelis's very chancy hat blew away and Cecil, rather lumberingly, retrieved it. As he handed it to her he saw she was crying.

"I *hate* wind," she murmured unconvincingly.

"Darling, I see I must take you away. This place has got on your nerves. When could we be ready?"

"To-morrow," she said, like a child that is much comforted.

"If we went early, we might stop and see Corte—go the other way by Les Îles Rousses."

"We can't get away from the red, you see," she said, "Les Îles Sanguinaires! Is it shorter?"

"Yes, a little, and a much better passage. Not so short as Leghorn, of course, but I rather want to see Corte."

"All right. I don't care much about Corte, but you say it's a better passage—"

"Yes, for you don't have to go round Cap Corso."

Her face was like April. "I say! I wonder how much I ought to give Julia? She isn't at all a common servant and has told me a lot I wanted to know. . . ."

"Thoroughly disturbed you, the old witch!"

"She's given me a charm—a sort of dull glowing stone, like an alexandrite that shines green by day and red at night. It's quite a good ring, Cecil. I can tell. Like some of those Uncle Horace had in his collection. She made me promise not to show it you till we are home again."

"I expect my father gave it to Chilina, or she took it! All right! We'll sell it at once. Oh, and give Julia a five-pound note. They always like money best."

"Cecil, *you'll* tell them, won't you?" Lelis begged as they turned to go downhill. It was getting rather dark and the noise of the Gravona, moaning and chiding, came to them rather clearly. "I'm afraid the wind is getting up," she said.

"Then we will wait. Be guided by circumstances. Darling, I can't tell you how glad I am we've decided to go."

"Darling, promise me you won't suddenly want to stop a night in Corte, or something?"

"Not I," he said sturdily.

"For I've been thinking," she asserted with violence, "that I'd rather risk being sick till I died of it than stop another night in this island. I'd have liked,

if there was any sort of boat train, to take it and get off to-night before dinner."

"I'm afraid there is no way," he said. "But still, going in the morning early you will at least miss the Capitaine, who is coming back at noon to complete your subjugation and, I confess, that will please me. Shall you mind?"

"I never want to see his snub face again," she said sternly. When she got home to England she would tell Cecil what the Captain had done.

"I see you have taken Corsica and everything it produces *en aversion*," Cecil said. "And I—I should hate to leave even my bones with them."

He lay down on his bed—he always said he could think better like that—and while she stood, peering low into the glass that was so inconvenient, to dress her hair, poured forth softly without bitterness a little litany of complaints, of arraignments of Fate as one to whom she destines and has always destined the worst.

"Corsica! A land of difficulties, stress and pain. Blood is the least of it. That walk in the forest river bed, like the wood in Dante! Your prevailing dream of striving . . . Freudian anxiety. . . ."

He resumed. "And this is the end of it all! A few talks and walks and to put people against us! The walks that frighten you and the meals that give me indigestion and black thoughts. We have gained more than a little aversion. . . . It is a fact that we have not gone down here. There is something wrong."

He turned like a shruggish child and laid his face in his hands. She flew to him.

"Cecil, darling—it *is* indigestion. Kiss me! Thank God we are going!"

Cecil was psychic. She felt he was right. Madame Bonelli made the merest polite opposition to their going! That it was, of course, windy. Though the English did not mind these crossings as much as the French. On the other hand, it might get worse, so they would be lucky to get away before. She herself had *attrapé un rhume*, Lelis knew, and sat wrapped up in her white *châle d'Inde* that Sir Frederick Barton had given her. She said she should never cross the Manche again. Their invitation, with which they had hoped to placate her, thus was quenched at the very beginning. It was old Pinsuto who showed perturbation. Lelis had not known he was such an excitable old fellow! He said, part in patois that his wife translated into French for him, with a peremptoriness that only might have been an effort at politeness, that he wished them to stop till his nephew came back. Lelis shook her pretty head at him—she did not hate him so much now that she was going to see the last of him so soon, he was quite a picturesque figure—and said that they must be a deal of trouble to Matalina. Matalina, faintly protesting, did not accede to his request that she should beg Madame Lelis to reconsider her decision. Andrea, getting up, straightening his back and walking up and down the little room, gave his wife a nasty look out of the eyes where all the go that was left to him resided. He bullied her, of course; he exercised a patriarchal power over this educated woman who knew so much more of the decencies of life than he did, having benefited by having lived nearly two years in the heart of London civilisation. Presently, wearied out, Andrea sat down again but continued to whine out maxims—observations on the

duties of Corsican hospitality as he saw them, the dangers of travelling *par ce vent*. . . . It was not safe. He himself had never crossed the sea, but he knew it was no place for a woman in a storm.

They said good-night and left the maniacal old creature in a dumb rage. Matalina would have her work cut out to soothe him. He did not want them to stay really—it was only self-will and temper at being thwarted that made his cruel eyes gleam and his hands twitch so. They both agreed in the stillness of their bedchamber that he was perhaps thinking of the disappointment of Regulus on being deprived of his drive with a pretty woman. Cecil gave Lelis some instances of his queer power of reading the thoughts of others and of leading them to confide in him. When you come to look into it you found it was always to Cecil that the secrets of the heart of persons who publicly exhibited aversion to him, had been confided.

"That common young man is the apple of his eye," he told Lelis, who, since last night, hated to hear the name of Regulus. "He is the cause of terrific ructions between Andrea and his wife. Do you know why she looks after his health so carefully? She told me."

"Told *you*, Cecil?"

"She desires to keep him alive as long as she can to form a bulwark for her against the Pancrazie. She can just tolerate Regulus but pretends to like him, so as to keep her husband in a good humour with *her*. For, the moment the breath is out of his body, she knows—what old Pinsuto does not, because senile decay has already set in, and he is hardly aware how badly he has treated his wife in the matter of his will—that they intend to plant her out in some convent with a pittance and run this house as an inn again with his money. The Pancrazie are nearly starving down there at Muracciole. The sawmill is not productive. They come and whine to their uncle. Matalina informed me with tears in her eyes that no prayers on her part would make Pinsuto alter his will that's made in their favour. She does think, poor dear, that it is *plutôt* unfair, and she plucked up courage to make him a scene to-night about Regulus. Nor does she approve, so she implied to me just before I came up, of Andrea pandering to the Captain's vices—keeping you *here* for him so that he can see you again and persuade you to let him take you to L'Inzecca. I don't either. . . . You seem depressed, darling?"

"It's this wind."

"It will go down before morning, I can assure you. Look, the clouds are flying already before the moon. . . ."

They went out into the balcony together.

"Julia," said Lelis, in spite of Cecil's ban on her name, "Julia is dying for us to go, for our own sakes. I suppose she thinks the wind might have got worse instead of better, as it has. I went in to her before dinner. The gale all day had evidently upset her dreadfully. Her eyes had gone right back into her head and she was jabbering away. . . ."

"Yes, wind is considered very ominous here. The women up in the mountains

cross themselves when it blows and say, Murder is abroad, or Murder is in the air."

"She kept muttering and shivering at every fresh gust and moaning Puaretto or Puaretta! I comforted her, saying that, if she meant me, I wasn't puaretta at all, but very rich in all things, had got a nice husband to protect me through life and had been very happy here and didn't really mind being seasick. And she seemed to cheer up a bit when she saw that I really didn't mind the passage, and asked me if we liked Regulus? She always calls you Cecc' Anton' or N'ton. Cheek! I said I didn't object to Regulus just to please her, and then a great gust came that shook the house and rattled the canvas and made it bag over us—I was sitting on the ladder that leads up into it—and didn't I quit that! Then she wrapped her face in her mandile and crouched down and I could get no more out of her, so I just shoved the five-pound note into her lap and came away."

Cecil said, as he lay down, "We shall get away to-morrow all right now that the wind has, like me, addressed itself to sleep. I'm glad, for I've sworn to myself to get you out of this before that fellow comes back. The impertinence of him! Does he really think I will let a rascally Corsican take my wife about the country in his damned go-cart?"

Lelis, with her hair down in a fair cloud that shone whenever she came within range of the lamp, was finding "forgets" and strapping and unstrapping valises. They were to leave Vivario by the ten o'clock train to Les Îles Rousses to-morrow, *via* Ponte de Lecca, reaching the shores of Corsica at seven. Madame Bonelli and Monsieur Bonelli, if he could be made to forgive them for the act of going, would accompany them to the station and Julia would take their luggage as she had brought it, in a handcart with a tarpaulin over it.

"I do hope Monsieur Bonelli won't think it necessary to kiss me, Cecil?"

"I had rather he did than that other fellow."

Oh, she would tell him all on the boat, or when they got to Nice, where they would stop at The Cimiez and become human, *i.e.* fashionable beings using powder-puffs, getting their shoes cleaned, and other adjuncts of civilisation.

Not now. They both were in need of a good night's rest.

All was packed. The portable clock, the little family portraits without which Lelis never travelled—the room was now a desert. But the moment she got into bed there would be an end of conversation, for Cecil was half asleep already, so she walked about, fingering distastefully the torn flap of canvas, giving it sundry tweaks which only brought it lower down. . . .

"I suppose, when we have gone, they'll do what I have been begging Matalina to have done ever since I came here. I can see it from your bed perfectly. It drops lower every day and it's all dark and black behind it, like Hell."

"I thought Hell was red. Never mind it. Put out the lamp and come in beside me."

"Yes, Cecil, I'm coming. I hope I've got everything in. . . . Lord's sake! I forgot the gun! We mustn't go off without it. It may be a do, but you can always give it away to someone."

"I did—to old Beard-in-the-ears. I told him he might keep it and give it away if he liked. He won't though. His eyes yearned for it."

"Of course they did. It's quite a good gun—for him. I don't believe that youth knew. He wanted to spite you, Cecil. I call it extravagant of you, dear."

"Well, anyhow, we should have lost it twenty-three times over on the way home, now shouldn't we? Do you remember the Provençal bread cupboard we lost at Avignon? That was you."

Lelis didn't like Barba-in-Orecchie having that gun. Her accusation of extravagance was nonsense. They could afford nearly any extravagance. She was just annoyed that Andrea should have it. To get over her vexation before getting into bed she went to the door-window that looked over the valley, drew the dimity curtain and stepped out. Yes, the wind had gone down and a struggling, harassed moon coped with torn clouds that raced across it, obscuring it completely every now and then. When it shone itself free of them it seemed to ride high and light the world, but just now the clouds were masters and she could not see her landmarks, the mountains, out Ajaccio way. No matter; she was going home by another line; that dreadful initial journey of six days ago, past the sullen horror of Bocognano, she would never make again.

The wind, that had fairly dropped, soughed wearily now and then in the crook of the valley below. Its everlasting whine made her think of the complaint of a child that is left behind. . . . And then the Cecaldis' dog, tied up somewhere nearer to her, howled at the moon, invisible behind the row of low houses just across the road by the Post Office . . . it lit them plainly . . . a bluish aura. . . .

She was going to-morrow. She wanted to say good-bye to the horse whose terrible lot she had hoped but failed to alleviate. She could never go near him to give him sugar for the stench. She could not very well go out and lean over the balustrade in her thin lace and chiffon nightgown. But she opened the half-door and spoke to it standing there at the foot of the wall. She felt moved to recite a sort of farewell speech in its direction. It soothed her to make it: it was like saying a prayer. . . .

"Poor old horse down there, good-bye! I did what I could for you. And now I hope you will soon die and get out of this, as we are going to do to-morrow. Yes, we are. Joy! You die, darling, die, and fulfil your mission to make good horseflesh, and thank God your very hard day is over."

The horse was a long way down but she could have sworn she heard it stir. Or something? There were noises—she heard them in this deep lull of the wind.

It was only ten o'clock. People were hardly in bed yet. Music . . . a soft, recurrent beat, as if someone was amusing himself with one of the weird national instruments, catamuse or zufoli . . . out there in the street by the Fountain of Diana. Or the wretched husband of Madame Buttafoce whose wife had locked him out, trying to make her let him in, beating weakly at his own door.

She knew a few people here now whom she would never see again, for to-morrow they would be well off this island that was so giddy and strange, so grand and so pretty, so beautiful and so wicked! It had disappointed her. Matalina had

disappointed her—everything and everybody except Ò Jù! It had been impossible to get to know Matalina or be very fond of her. She was so Corsican *au fond* and so full of merely peasant virtues. A country cow! How could she have had the knowledge of Mamma, have shared her days and her thoughts—her bed even, at Brighton—and then come home and married that dreadful old man with his dreadful nephew? Only poor Chili, who would have none of him and had preferred to die of love for her 'Ora, she felt she would have liked to know. . . . But she was better dead. . . . Uncle Horace would never have been kind to her.

But there was no doubt that Chili and Chili's death was what had made the visit so deplorable. The circumstances of it—perhaps the cause—rankled in the memory of the old man who had been cheated of Chilina by death and married her sister as a *pis aller*, and made him hate her Cecil because of his father's selfishness. Andrea had hardly spoken a word to Cecil and then only because of her. Lelis was confident that, if it had not been for her setting herself to charm her host, a *rixe*, not *sanglante* because of modern times, would have declared itself. . . . Funny how anxious Andrea had been to keep her from going away! He would not have prayed Cecil to stay. He just hated him!

It was quite warm! She was aware of the odours of the lentisk, the myrtle; the thymy aromatic smell of Corsica rose to her nostrils. Heavenly! But she knew she was overjoyed to think she would smell it no more.

She went in, closing the door part of the window gently for fear of disturbing Cecil and setting that magnificent but overworked brain going again. The little noise she made was repeated by another faint sound, from the left-hand corner of the room corresponding to the position of the ladder that led up in the kitchen through the canvas ceiling to—? Julia going up to bed! If she slept up there? Lelis did not suppose she did, really. There was nothing but rafters to sleep on. More likely a *natte* on the floor of the kitchen, put out of sight in the day. Highly insanitary! But they were going. . . .

She extinguished the lamp, and as she would not, could not sleep alone this last night, she got into the big wide bed that was Cecil's. He was lying on his arms like a soldier, with his face to the wall.

Bother! She had not drawn the window curtains quite together. The moon was out of the clouds again and the crude, steely light was coming in . . . there was a white patch on the middle of the floor and the walls of the room were gleaming like the white face of an invalid.

It was too much fag to get out again and perhaps it wouldn't last so strong—there were always clouds. . . .

Cecil was awake and he begged her to put her arms round him in the way he liked, so that he could feel them encircling his body. It was, he often said, the most poetical part of being married and the moment with her that he really liked best of all, for it gave him happy dreams and coloured them. The wonderful things Cecil said he saw when he was just going off! Processions, tournaments—always something spectacular!

The position, though honourable, was dreadfully tiring but it never lasted

long. Cecil went off to sleep long before her arms got cramp in them. She loved to feel their positions for about five minutes thus sublimely reversed, she, the little one, protecting the big one. Cecil wanted his hand held like a baby. He was afraid of the dark, he admitted it, or rather of the twilight—half-lights of any kind. When he lived with them in Lancaster Gate, Mamma and the housekeeper used to complain, Lelis remembered, of Cecil's habit, even in early spring and autumn, of turning the lights on all the way to the top just to light him to his room to dress. Light was a regular craze of his. He even had had engraved on one of his seals that dangled from his fob, where she had tried in vain to get him to hang Julia's ring and fetish, the motto that used to be over Victor Hugo's bed at Guernsey—*Nox, Mors, Lux*. Night, Death, Light! . . .

He was probably off by now, she could tell by his breathing. No dreams, no processions, to-night. Yet, lest he should still be conscious of and miss her, she only half turned away from him, flapping one tired arm out towards the edge of the bed and leaving one under his head. That blessed moonlight illumination was still on, lying mostly on the left-hand corner by the hole in the ceiling that had come to possess such a devilish, alternate repulsion and fascination for her. The grand upheaval of marriage, she began to think, had made her more nervous than she was before, certainly more excitable. . . .

But she contrived to lie on, still as death and the moonlight, her body stiffened, her bright eyes roving and returning over to the hateful cynosure. Proud and staunch, like a good nurse holding a baby or a good dog watching his master's body. Protecting her Protector. Her feeling for Cecil at this moment was more maternal than sexual; he was less her lover than her master; she was only a child permitted to caress the lord of her life—the parent of her mentality. She was growing up very slowly, making the very faintest spurts of original thinking and honest feeling under his direction. She would now and again spout her inadequate Victorian commonplaces and obey the precepts of her charming but behind-hand mother and sister. It was still in her to repeat her childish prayers —"*Gentle Jesus, meek and mild*," or "*Matthew, Mark, Luke and John*," and Cecil loved her to do it and never, never made fun of her. . . .

There was a text that Isabelle, the always *dévote* and now a nun, who used to go about the house at Lancaster Gate sticking texts over people's beds, had placed in her little sister's room with special intention. For Lelis was indeed a mischievous, tricksome child and once had positively stolen half a box of chocolates.

The terrible and significant legend done in green and Gothic letters with gold blazoning impressed on Lelis for so many years now, for some reason or other, kept coming into her head. *Thou God Seest Me*. She felt just now exactly as she had been used to feel at Lancaster Gate when, in the course of the day that had seemed so long and was now so far back, she had done something that she knew she ought not to have done, and the message written on the wall, as it used to do, was jogging her little weak, much belaboured conscience—working on her to confess and be forgiven. It was nice to be forgiven, but one did not confess for the sake of that *only*, but because, anyhow, God had actually wit-

nessed one's crime, whatever it was, and one would be found out sooner or later. She had done nothing now, unless it meant the act of receiving, and only very partially, the kiss of Captain Regulus, and that she fully meant to confess as soon as they got on dry land the other side. Such a teeny, teeny little infidelity might surely wait till to-morrow?

It was already to-morrow. She was convinced it was after twelve, though she could not leave Cecil or disturb him by hunting for his watch, which ought to be somewhere in the bed.

Oh dear! She was absolutely convinced that God *was* looking, that His Eye of Awe was fixed on her, Unforgiving, out of the hole made by the torn flap of canvas over there in the corner on a level with the bed. That was where the canvas had sagged down to.

God's Eye, straight out of Heaven, looking down on her through a telescope, as she had looked up the barrel of Cecil's gun the night before. *Calibre étroit*. . . .

She flung both arms round Cecil and, over her shoulder, faced the corner of the room. She was fully awake—now. There *was* something like an eye there, a tiny circle on which the moonbeam was glinting. . . .

Or Julia's ring that someone was holding out for a finger to slip into?

She could not stand it. It was a nightmare she had been having and that had carried on into wakingness. Cecil must free her from it. She spoke to him, putting her mouth close to his ear:

"Cecil! Cecil! Wake, oh, wake! I want you. You must take me in your arms a moment. . . . I've had a fright. That beastly flap. . . ."

Cecil woke slowly, grudgingly, but he did not shake her off as people sometimes do brutally in their sleep. He kissed her hands as they came together under his chin. He perhaps hoped that it would content her and that she would let him slip into the chrism of sleep again. But that would not do, she could command him; he must wake quite up, look round the room with those far, all-seeing eyes of his that missed nothing and tell her what a fool she was and that there was nothing there.

At last Cecil, the result of her insidious, strenuous pulling of him towards her, pivoted round a little. Holding her to him, for she appeared to desire it, his eyes, over her head as it lay on his breast, roved carefully all round the room to find out what it was that had so frightened his Dear.

Cecil's eyes needed not to rove long; he had the faculty always of seeing nearly everything at a glance. What he saw now made him endeavour to put his young wife away from him as far as might be, which was not at all what she wanted. She held him as tightly as she could, covering him with her body. She was beside herself with fear and would have strangled him sooner than let him go. For, by the accelerated pulsation of Cecil's heart-beats, she felt that he had "seen something" too.

She lay panting, one lovely hip—the side away from him—bare, for her struggling had rolled her nightgown into a swathe, but the other side was pressed

against him, her hair was over his face and her lips on his lips so that he could hardly get a word out. He contrived to say:

"Darling, you must let me go. . . . You *must*. I command you. This is for me."

"First you must tell me," she said in his ear—"First I must know what it is in that corner."

"*Cane Canisti, Putra Ascendisti, Ó Christú—*"

She begged him not to put her off with nonsense. . . .

"Look here—lie beside me, will you, not *on* me! I want my arms free. I want to. . . . Won't you, won't you, my darling? Oh, Christ, what to do?"

A period of quiescence ensued. Cecil seemed for all the world to be thinking, as he did when he was writing, and she always kept quiet till he found the Word. There was no noise except the beating of their hearts and no particular need for her to move away from him. But his breathing was loud and full like the rhythm of a steam piston under her little airily bounding, frivolous heart. She said presently, rather as if she were asking him to abate a nuisance:

"Cecil, you aren't going to force me to turn round and look at it, whatever it is, so as to cure me of my silliness? I shouldn't sleep any more, anyway. I daresay it's nothing . . . but can't you just tell me what it is in so many words, and then perhaps I could promise you to be sensible?"

Cecil said, quite clearly:

"In so many words, dear, it is . . . The Vengeance—the Vendetta of God. It won't be yet—not while you choose to lie where you are . . . but I can't let you, not for long. Still, perhaps a cramp . . . he is old. But we are in great danger. I am. Try and think of what I told you when we first came—that notion of lying with me on a mattress high up in space. We settled that no harm could befall us even then, unless we stirred or put a leg out of bed . . . over the edge."

She wailed.

"Stop! It is only to keep you quiet for a little. Be a good girl and stop crying and let me consider."

Lelis promised and lay very still, her motor nerves paralysed by her unnamed terror, endeavouring to collect her ideas so as to discover what Cecil had meant by that about the Mattress in Space—her own simile, only she had forgotten. Instead, she found herself repeating over and over again the wretched jingle—"*Cane Canisti* . . . *Cane Canisti* . . ." her mind trailing off before she got to the end of the phrase and she no wiser. . . .

Cecil said suddenly: "Where's my gun?"

"You said you had given it to old Andrea and I was cross."

"Oh—ah!" He was silent again and presently he squeezed her wrist to stimulate her attention—

"Listen, darling, to me and endeavour to answer the questions I am going to ask you in French, or patois if you can manage it. Move a little, dear, so that my voice can be heard."

He spoke quite calmly, but his forehead, as in shifting her position she grazed it, was moist with sweat. He must have been thinking very hard. And his poor

heart as her ear slipped lower down seemed to her almost to have stopped beating.

"Cecil, is it a game?"

"Rather like—only the conditions are a bit different—the Thought Reading game we used to put up, you and I, in Lancaster Gate, and take even your mother's Herrn Professor in. I must say I prefer a decent German to these damned Italians. But it may fail for want of previous consultation. . . . I'm afraid you'll not be able to get me. . . . But try. It's all there is."

Speaking loudly and formally he said to her in French that was not so good as hers:

"You were telling me, *ma chérie*, how your mother loved—" He muttered in English, "I forget their damned names!—That your mother and *ces demoiselles* were always together, from the moment they left their mother's care, *n'est pas?* She never permitted herself to lose sight of them—or left them alone with anyone for a single minute?"

"With women, do you mean? Of course she did."

"Men—*avec des monsieurs*. My father—say Monsieur 'Orazio—my father was never in a room alone with either of them?"

"I expect not. We children never gave him a chance. We never left them tranquil for an instant."

"Always in their petticoats, eh? And my father, 'Orazio, he was nearly always away on his yacht?"

"Yes, generally . . ." She could not help qualifying, though his peremptory rejoinder, "In effect, always," made her answer "Yes!" in a kind of little shout. What a stupid game, played at twelve o'clock at night, in a bedroom in Corsica between two people alone and no audience! Cecil went on:

"So much so that his town house was shut up all the winter—the covers on the furniture for the whole year—and, as a child, I lived with you in your mother's house, for there was nowhere else for me to go to, I had no home."

"Puaretto!" she said.

"Yes, almost an orphan. My father loved his yacht so much that he could never leave it. He did not return at all with your mother and father and Monsieur de St. Brice when they brought Chilina and Matalina to Lancaster Gate, but said good-bye to them all in Paris and rejoined the yacht at Marseilles and on to his villa at Ventimiglia."

"I did not know all that, I was so little."

He made her nervous, squeezing her arm to signify that she was not playing the game properly. She knew she was muffing it. She felt like a trained animal exhausted by the tricks it is made to perform, longing to go back to its cage and stand on four legs again. But the showman was rigorous:

"And when my father did return from his cruise, which lasted a whole year—"

Cecil was telling such lies. But she supposed it didn't matter much now and he hated so to be contradicted. . . .

—"You and the girls were all living together in a house my aunt had taken

at the seaside where there weren't too many people, and your mother and the girls could bathe and paddle with the children."

Cecil was talking in rather a more natural voice now and all about such baby things. She felt reassured. Nothing so bad perhaps . . . She laughed out:

"Good!" Cecil whispered.

—"Yes, Matalina and Chili were so funny! Nothing would induce them to lift their skirts above their ankles, even though there was no one there, and of course they both spoiled their silk dresses and were so cross when we children made fun of them."

"And then," he said quickly, "you stayed till nearly Christmas at Brighton, and my father and stepmother and Monsieur de St. Brice came down from London in my father's four-in-hand and paid you a visit."

"Uncle Horace wasn't married then and Monsieur de St. Brice had gone back to France."

"No, I remember. It was Lord Ivo Gray came down with him, who admired Chilina, so that my good aunt was trying to arrange a marriage between them."

"But it was Matalina Lord Ivo admired. They both liked him and fought about him."

Cecil whispered, "Don't say too much." Then very loud: "Well—and when my father and Lord Ivo came down they did not stay in the house with you at all?"

"No. Not room. At the hotel—they liked the eating there better. But they came to my birthday dinner at four o'clock. It was so close to Noël that we had a Christmas Tree."

"My father caused that to be installed and gave you all splendid presents?"

"To my mother he did, and to the others things out of crackers. Uncle Horace was not great at giving presents. I believe he was a bit of a miser. Oh, to Chilina, because it was her birthday, he once did give a ring."

"*Bien!* Out of a cracker too." His voice trembled.

"No, it wasn't. Chili said it was diamonds. She wore it a long time. She called it her *anneau de fiançailles*—"

Cecil groaned at her and there was a sound coming from the corner as if a chair had been violently thrown down.

Then her husband, seizing her roundabout, had flung her across him with such extreme violence, over on the side of the bed against the wall, that it nearly stunned her, but she heard a click and the gun go off. A moment later she got back to Cecil and clasped him, wet and gluey, as if he were dissolving in her arms and heard him say:

"Darling, you *would* bring me among these savages!" and knew that it was his life's blood that was flowing between them.

Someone, a man said to her:

"Do not cry, Madame. My nephew will console you."

She remembered, before the long night descended on her, that Cecil had said a day or two before it happened:

"I suppose I ought to wear the amulet Julia gave you for me. For if anything happened to me, how are you to get home?"

Barry Pain

THE END OF A SHOW

from STORIES IN THE DARK

Grant Richards, 1901

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It was a little village in the extreme north of Yorkshire, three miles from a railway-station on a small branch line. It was not a progressive village; it just kept still and respected itself. The hills lay all round it, and seemed to shut it out from the rest of the world. Yet folks were born, and lived, and died, much as in the more important centres; and there were intervals which required to be filled with amusement. Entertainments were given by amateurs from time to time in the schoolroom; sometimes hand-bell ringers or a conjurer would visit the place, but their reception was not always encouraging. "Conjurers is nowt, an' ringers is nowt," said the sad native judiciously; "ar dornt regard 'em." But the native brightened up when in the summer months a few caravans found their way to a piece of waste land adjoining the churchyard. They formed the village fair, and for two days they were a popular resort. But it was understood that the fair had not the glories of old days; it had dwindled. Most things in connection with this village dwindled.

The first day of the fair was drawing to a close. It was half-past ten at night, and at eleven the fair would close until the following morning. This last half-hour was fruitful in business. The steam roundabout was crowded, the proprietor of the peep-show was taking pennies very fast, although not so fast as the proprietor of another, somewhat repulsive, show. A fair number patronized a canvas booth which bore the following inscription: POPULAR SCIENCE LECTURES, *Admission Free.*

At one end of this tent was a table covered with red baize; on it were bottles and boxes, a human skull, a retort, a large book, and some bundles of dried herbs. Behind it was the lecturer, an old man, gray and thin, wearing a bright-coloured dressing-gown. He lectured volubly and enthusiastically; his energy and the atmosphere of the tent made him very hot, and occasionally he mopped his forehead.

"I am about to exhibit to you," he said, speaking clearly and correctly, "a secret known to few, and believed to have come originally from those wise men

of the East referred to in Holy Writ." Here he filled two test-tubes with water, and placed some bluish-green crystals in one and some yellow crystals in the other. He went on talking, quoting scraps of Latin, telling stories, making local and personal allusions, finally coming back again to his two test-tubes, both of which now contained almost colourless solutions. He poured them both together into a flat glass vessel, and the mixture at once turned to a deep brownish purple. He threw a fragment of something on to the surface of the mixture, and that fragment at once caught fire. This favourite trick succeeded; the audience were undoubtedly impressed, and before they quite realized by what logical connection the old man had arrived at the subject, he was talking to them about the abdomen. He seemed to know the most unspeakable and intimate things about the abdomen. He had made pills which suited its peculiar needs, which he could and would sell in boxes at sixpence and one shilling, according to size. He sold four boxes at once, and was back in his classical and anecdotal stage, when a woman pressed forward. She was a very poor woman. Could she have a box of these pills at half-price? Her son was very bad, very bad. It would be a kindness.

He interrupted her in a dry, distinct voice:

"Woman, I never yet did anyone a kindness, not even myself."

However, a friend pushed some money into her hand, and she bought two boxes.

It was past twelve o'clock now. The flaring lights were out in the little group of caravans on the waste ground. The tired proprietors of the shows were asleep. The gravestones in the churchyard were glimmering white in the bright moonlight. But at the entrance to that little canvas booth the quack doctor sat on one of his boxes, smoking a clay pipe. He had taken off the dressing-gown, and was in his shirt-sleeves; his clothes were black, much worn. His attention was arrested—he thought that he heard the sound of sobbing.

"It's a God-forsaken world," he said aloud. After a second's silence he spoke again. "No, I never did a kindness even to myself, though I thought I did, or I shouldn't have come to this."

He took his pipe from his mouth and spat. Once more he heard that strange wailing sound; this time he arose, and walked in the direction of it.

Yes, that was it. It came from that caravan standing alone where the trees made a dark spot. The caravan was gaudily painted, and there were steps from the door to the ground. He remembered having noticed it once during the day. It was evident that someone inside was in trouble—great trouble. The old man knocked gently at the door.

"Who's there? What's the matter?"

"Nothing," said a broken voice from within.

"Are you a woman?"

There was a fearful laugh.

"Neither man nor woman—a show."

"What do you mean?"

"Go round to the side, and you'll see."

The old man went round, and by the light of two wax matches caught a glimpse of part of the rough painting on the side of the caravan. The matches dropped from his hand. He came back, and sat down on the steps of the caravan.

"You are not like that," he said.

"No, worse. I'm not dressed in pretty clothes, and lying on a crimson velvet couch. I'm half naked, in a corner of this cursed box, and crying because my owner beat me. Now go, or I'll open the door and show myself to you as I am now. It would frighten you; it would haunt your sleep."

"Nothing frightens me. I was a fool once, but I have never been frightened. What right has this owner over you?"

"He is my father," the voice screamed loudly; then there was more weeping; then it spoke again: "It's awful; I could bear anything now—anything—if I thought it would ever be any better; but it won't. My mind's a woman's and my wants are a woman's, but I am not a woman. I am a show. The brutes stand round me, talk to me, touch me!"

"There's a way out," said the old man quietly, after a pause.

An idea occurred to him.

"I know—and I daren't take it—I've got a thing here, but I daren't use it."

"You could drink something—something that wouldn't hurt?"

"Yes."

"You are quite alone?"

"Yes; my owner is in the village, at the inn."

"Then wait a minute."

The old man hastened back to the canvas booth, and fumbled about with his chemicals. He murmured something about doing someone a kindness at last. Then he returned to the caravan with a glass of colourless liquid in his hand.

"Open the door and take it," he said.

The door was opened a very little way. A thin hand was thrust out and took the glass eagerly. The door closed, and the voice spoke again.

"It will be easy?"

"Yes."

"Good-bye, then. To your health——"

The old man heard the glass crash on the wooden floor, then he went back to his seat in front of the booth, and carefully lit another pipe.

"I will not go," he said aloud. "I fear nothing—not even the results of my best action."

He listened attentively.

No sound whatever came from the caravan. All was still. Far away the sky was growing lighter with the dawn of a fine summer day.

H. G. Wells

THE CONE

from The Plattner Story and Others

Methuen, 1897

Permission to reprint is granted by the author

The night was hot and overcast, the sky red-rimmed with the lingering sunset of mid-summer. They sat at the open window, trying to fancy the air was fresher there. The trees and shrubs of the garden stood stiff and dark; beyond in the roadway a gas-lamp burnt, bright orange against the hazy blue of the evening. Farther were the three lights of the railway signal against the lowering sky. The man and woman spoke to one another in low tones.

"He does not suspect?" said the man, a little nervously.

"Not he," she said peevishly, as though that too irritated her. "He thinks of nothing but the works and the prices of fuel. He has no imagination, no poetry."

"None of these men of iron have," he said sententiously. "They have no hearts."

"*He* has not," she said. She turned her discontented face towards the window. The distant sound of a roaring and rushing drew nearer and grew in volume; the house quivered; one heard the metallic rattle of the tender. As the train passed, there was a glare of light above the cutting and a driving tumult of smoke; one, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight black oblongs—eight trucks—passed across the dim grey of the embankment, and were suddenly extinguished one by one in the throat of the tunnel, which, with the last, seemed to swallow down train, smoke, and sound in one abrupt gulp.

"This country was all fresh and beautiful once," he said; "and now—it is Gehenna. Down that way—nothing but pot-banks and chimneys belching fire and dust into the face of heaven. . . . But what does it matter? An end comes, an end to all this cruelty. . . . *To-morrow*." He spoke the last word in a whisper.

"*To-morrow*," she said, speaking in a whisper too, and still staring out of the window.

"Dear!" he said, putting his hand on hers.

She turned with a start, and their eyes searched one another's. Hers softened to his gaze. "My dear one!" she said, and then: "It seems so strange—that you should have come into my life like this—to open"—She paused.

"To open?" he said.

"All this wonderful world"—she hesitated, and spoke still more softly—"this world of *love* to me."

Then suddenly the door clicked and closed. They turned their heads, and he started violently back. In the shadow of the room stood a great shadowy figure —silent. They saw the face dimly in the half-light, with unexpressive dark patches under the pent-house brows. Every muscle in Raut's body suddenly became tense. When could the door have opened? What had he heard? Had he heard all? What had he seen? A tumult of questions.

The new-comer's voice came at last, after a pause that seemed interminable. "Well?" he said.

"I was afraid I had missed you, Horrocks," said the man at the window, gripping the window-ledge with his hand. His voice was unsteady.

The clumsy figure of Horrocks came forward out of the shadow. He made no answer to Raut's remark. For a moment he stood above them.

The woman's heart was cold within her. "I told Mr. Raut it was just possible you might come back," she said, in a voice that never quivered.

Horrocks, still silent, sat down abruptly in the chair by her little work-table. His big hands were clenched; one saw now the fire of his eyes under the shadow of his brows. He was trying to get his breath. His eyes went from the woman he had trusted to the friend he had trusted, and then back to the woman.

By this time and for the moment all three half understood one another. Yet none dared say a word to ease the pent-up things that choked them.

It was the husband's voice that broke the silence at last.

"You wanted to see me?" he said to Raut.

Raut started as he spoke. "I came to see you," he said, resolved to lie to the last.

"Yes," said Horrocks.

"You promised," said Raut, "to show me some fine effects of moonlight and smoke."

"I promised to show you some fine effects of moonlight and smoke," repeated Horrocks in a colourless voice.

"And I thought I might catch you to-night before you went down to the works," proceeded Raut, "and come with you."

There was another pause. Did the man mean to take the thing coolly? Did he after all know? How long had he been in the room? Yet even at the moment when they heard the door, their attitudes. . . . Horrocks glanced at the profile of the woman, shadowy pallid in the half-light. Then he glanced at Raut, and seeemed to recover himself suddenly. "Of course," he said, "I promised to show you the works under their proper dramatic conditions. It's odd how I could have forgotten."

"If I am troubling you"—began Raut.

Horrocks started again. A new light had suddenly come into the sultry gloom of his eyes. "Not in the least," he said.

"Have you been telling Mr. Raut of all these contrasts of flame and shadow you think so splendid?" said the woman, turning now to her husband for the first time, her confidence creeping back again, her voice just one half-note too high. "That dreadful theory of yours that machinery is beautiful, and everything

else in the world ugly. I thought he would not spare you, Mr. Raut. It's his great theory, his one discovery in art."

"I am slow to make discoveries," said Horrocks grimly, damping her suddenly. "But what I discover . . ." He stopped.

"Well?" she said.

"Nothing," and suddenly he rose to his feet.

"I promised to show you the works," he said to Raut, and put his big, clumsy hand on his friend's shoulder. "And you are ready to go?"

"Quite," said Raut, and stood up also.

There was another pause. Each of them peered through the indistinctness of the dusk at the other two. Horrocks' hand still rested on Raut's shoulder. Raut half fancied still that the incident was trivial after all. But Mrs. Horrocks knew her husband better, knew that grim quiet in his voice, and the confusion in her mind took a vague shape of physical evil. "Very well," said Horrocks, and, dropping his hand, turned towards the door.

"My hat?" Raut looked round in the half-light.

"That's my work-basket," said Mrs. Horrocks with a gust of hysterical laughter. Their hands came together on the back of the chair. "Here it is!" he said. She had an impulse to warn him in an undertone, but she could not frame a word. "Don't go!" and "Beware of him!" struggled in her mind, and the swift moment passed.

"Got it?" said Horrocks, standing with the door half open.

Raut stepped towards him. "Better say good-bye to Mrs. Horrocks," said the ironmaster, even more grimly quiet in his tone than before.

Raut started and turned. "Good-evening, Mrs. Horrocks," he said, and their hands touched.

Horrocks held the door open with a ceremonial politeness unusual in him towards men. Raut went out, and then, after a wordless look at her, her husband followed. She stood motionless while Raut's light footfall and her husband's heavy tread, like bass and treble, passed down the passage together. The front door slammed heavily. She went to the window, moving slowly, and stood watching—leaning forward. The two men appeared for a moment at the gateway in the road, passed under the street lamp, and were hidden by the black masses of the shrubbery. The lamp-light fell for a moment on their faces, showing only unmeaning pale patches, telling nothing of what she still feared, and doubted, and craved vainly to know. Then she sank down into a crouching attitude in the big arm-chair, her eyes wide open and staring out at the red lights from the furnaces that flickered in the sky. An hour after she was still there, her attitude scarcely changed.

The oppressive stillness of the evening weighed heavily upon Raut. They went side by side down the road in silence, and in silence turned into the cinder-made by-way that presently opened out of the prospect of the valley.

A blue haze, half dust, half mist, touched the long valley with mystery. Beyond were Hanley and Etruria, grey and black masses, outlined thinly by the rare golden dots of the street-lamps, and here and there a gaslit window, or the

yellow glare of some late-working factory or crowded public-house. Out of the masses, clear and slender against the evening sky, rose a multitude of tall chimneys, many of them reeking, a few smokeless during a season of "play." Here and there a pallid patch and ghostly stunted beehive shapes showed the position of a pot-bank, or a wheel, black and sharp against the hot lower sky, marked some colliery where they raise the iridescent coal of the place. Nearer at hand was the broad stretch of railway, and half invisible trains shunted—a steady puffing and rumbling, with every now and then a ringing concussion and a series of impacts, and a passage of intermittent puffs of white steam across the further view. And to the left, between the railway and the dark mass of the low hill beyond, dominating the whole view, colossal, inky-black, and crowned with smoke and fitful flames, stood the great cylinders of the Jeddah Company Blast Furnaces, the central edifices of the big ironworks of which Horrocks was the manager. They stood heavy and threatening, full of an incessant turmoil of flames and seething molten iron, and about the feet of them rattled the rolling-mills, and the steam-hammer beat heavily and splashed the white iron sparks hither and thither. Even as they looked, a truckful of fuel was shot into one of the giants, and the red flames gleamed out, and a confusion of smoke and black dust came boiling upwards towards the sky.

"Certainly you get some fine effects of colour with your furnaces," said Raut, breaking a silence that had become apprehensive.

Horrocks grunted. He stood with his hands in his pockets, frowning down at the dim steaming railway and the busy ironworks beyond, frowning as if he were thinking out some knotty problem.

Raut glanced at him and away again. "At present your moonlight effect is hardly ripe," he continued, looking upward; "the moon is still smothered by the vestiges of daylight."

Horrocks stared at him with the expression of a man who has suddenly awakened. "Vestiges of daylight? . . . Of course, of course." He too looked up at the moon, pale still in the mid-summer sky. "Come along," he said suddenly, and, gripping Raut's arm in his hand, made a move towards the path that dropped from them to the railway.

Raut hung back. Their eyes met and saw a thousand things in a moment that their lips came near to say. Horrocks' hand tightened and then relaxed. He let go, and before Raut was aware of it, they were arm in arm, and walking, one unwillingly enough, down the path.

"You see the fine effect of the railway signals towards Burslem," said Horrocks, suddenly breaking into loquacity, striding fast and tightening the grip of his elbow the while. "Little green lights and red and white lights, all against the haze. You have an eye for effect, Raut, it's a fine effect. And look at those furnaces of mine, how they rise upon us as we come down the hill. That to the right is my pet—seventy feet of him. I packed him myself, and he's boiled away cheerfully with iron in his guts for five long years. I've a particular fancy for *him*. That line of red there—a lovely bit of warm orange you'd call it, Raut—that's the puddler's furnaces, and there, in the hot light, three black figures—did you

see the white splash of the steam-hammer then?—that's the rolling-mills. Come along! Clang, clatter, how it goes rattling across the floor! Sheet tin, Raut—amazing stuff. Glass mirrors are not in it when the stuff comes from the mill. And, squelch!—there goes the hammer again. Come along!"

He had to stop talking to catch his breath. His arm twisted into Raut's with benumbing tightness. He had come striding down the black path towards the railway as though he was possessed. Raut had not spoken a word, had simply hung back against Horrocks' pull with all his strength.

"I say," he said now, laughing nervously, but with an undernote of snarl in his voice, "why on earth are you nipping my arm off, Horrocks, and dragging me along like this?"

At length Horrocks released him. His manner changed again. "Nipping your arm off?" he said. "Sorry. But it's you taught me the trick of walking in that friendly way."

"You haven't learnt the refinements of it yet then," said Raut, laughing artificially again. "By Jove! I'm black and blue." Horrocks offered no apology. They stood now near the bottom of the hill, close to the fence that bordered the railway. The ironworks had grown larger and spread out with their approach. They looked up to the blast furnaces now instead of down; the further view of Etruria and Hanley had dropped out of sight with their descent. Before them, by the stile, rose a notice-board, bearing, still dimly visible, the words, "BEWARE OF THE TRAINS," half hidden by splashes of coaly mud.

"Fine effects," said Horrocks, waving his arm. "Here comes a train. The puffs of smoke, the range glare, the round eye of light in front of it, the melodious rattle. Fine effects! But these furnaces of mine used to be finer, before we shoved cones in their throats, and saved the gas."

"How!" said Raut. "Cones?"

"Cones, my man, cones. I'll show you one nearer. The flames used to flare out of the open throats, great—what is it?—pillars of cloud by day, red and black smoke, and pillars of fire by night. Now we run it off in pipes, and burn it to heat the blast, and the top is shut by a cone. You'll be interested in that cone."

"But every now and then," said Raut, "you get a burst of fire and smoke up there."

"The cone's not fixed, it's hung by a chain from a lever, and balanced by an equipoise. You shall see it nearer. Else, of course, there'd be no way of getting fuel into the thing. Every now and then the cone dips, and out comes the flare."

"I see," said Raut. He looked over his shoulder. "The moon gets brighter," he said.

"Come along," said Horrocks abruptly, gripping his shoulder again, and moving him suddenly towards the railway crossing. And then came one of those swift incidents, vivid, but so rapid that they leave one doubtful and reeling. Halfway across, Horrocks' hand suddenly clenched upon him like a vice, and swung him backward and through a half-turn, so that he looked up the line. And there a chain of lamp-lit carriage-windows telescoped swiftly as it came towards them, and the red and yellow lights of an engine grew larger and larger,

rushing down upon them. As he grasped what this meant, he turned his face to Horrocks, and pushed with all his strength against the arm that held him back between the rails. The struggle did not last a moment. Just as certain as it was that Horrocks held him there, so certain was it that he had been violently lugged out of danger.

"Out of the way," said Horrocks, with a gasp, as the train came rattling by, and they stood panting by the gate into the ironworks.

"I did not see it coming," said Raut still, even in spite of his own apprehensions, trying to keep up an appearance of ordinary intercourse.

Horrocks answered with a grunt. "The cone," he said, and then, as one who recovers himself, "I thought you did not hear."

"I didn't," said Raut.

"I wouldn't have had you run over then for the world," said Horrocks.

"For a moment I lost my nerve," said Raut.

Horrocks stood for half a minute, then turned abruptly towards the ironworks again. "See how fine these great mounds of mine, these clinker-heaps, look in the night! That truck yonder, up above there! Up it goes, and out-tilts the slag. See the palpitating red stuff go sliding down the slope. As we get nearer, the heap rises up and cuts the blast furnaces. See the quiver up above the big one. Not that way! This way, between the heaps. That goes to the puddling furnaces, but I want to show you the canal first." He came and took Raut by the elbow, and so they went along side by side. Raut answered Horrocks vaguely. What, he asked himself, had really happened on the line? Was he deluding himself with his own fancies, or had Horrocks actually held him back in the way of the train? Had he just been within an ace of being murdered?

Suppose this slouching, scowling monster *did* know anything? For a minute or two then Raut was really afraid for his life, but the mood passed as he reasoned with himself. After all, Horrocks might have heard nothing. At any rate, he pulled him out of the way in time. His odd manner might be due to the mere vague jealousy he had shown once before. He was talking now of the ash-heaps and the canal. "Eigh?" said Horrocks.

"What?" said Raut. "Rather! The haze in the moonlight. Fine!"

"Our canal," said Horrocks, stopping suddenly. "Our canal by moonlight and firelight is an immense effect. You've never seen it? Fancy that! You've spent too many of your evenings philandering up in Newcastle there. I tell you, for real florid effects—But you shall see. Boiling water . . ."

As they came out of the labyrinth of clinker-heaps and mounds of coal and ore, the noises of the rolling-mill sprang upon them suddenly, loud, near, and distinct. Three shadowy workmen went by and touched their caps to Horrocks. Their faces were vague in the darkness. Raut felt a futile impulse to address them, and before he could frame his words, they passed into the shadows. Horrocks pointed to the canal close before them now: a weird-looking place it seemed, in the blood-red reflections of the furnaces. The hot water that cooled the tuyères came into it, some fifty yards up—a tumultuous, almost boiling affluent, and the steam rose up from the water in silent white wisps and streaks,

wrapping damply about them, an incessant succession of ghosts coming up from the black and red eddies, a white uprising that made the head swim. The shining black tower of the larger blast-furnace rose overhead out of the mist, and its tumultuous riot filled their ears. Raut kept away from the edge of the water, and watched Horrocks.

"Here it is red," said Horrocks, "blood-red vapour as red and hot as sin; but yonder there, where the moonlight falls on it, and it drives across the clinker-heaps, it is as white as death."

Raut turned his head for a moment, and then came back hastily to his watch on Horrocks. "Come along to the rolling-mills," said Horrocks. The threatening hold was not so evident that time, and Raut felt a little reassured. But all the same, what on earth did Horrocks mean about "white as death" and "red as sin"? Coincidence, perhaps?

They went and stood behind the puddlers for a little while, and then through the rolling-mills, where amidst an incessant din the deliberate steam-hammer beat the juice out of the succulent iron, and black, half-naked Titans rushed the plastic bars, like hot sealing-wax, between the wheels. "Come on," said Horrocks in Raut's ear, and they went and peeped through the little glass hole behind the tuyères, and saw the tumbled fire writhing in the pit of the blast-furnace. It left one eye blinded for a while. Then, with green and blue patches dancing across the dark, they went to the lift by which the trucks of ore and fuel and lime were raised to the top of the big cylinder.

And out upon the narrow rail that overhung the furnace Raut's doubts came upon him again. Was it wise to be here? If Horrocks did know—everything! Do what he could, he could not resist a violent trembling. Right under foot was a sheer depth of seventy feet. It was a dangerous place. They pushed by a truck of fuel to get to the railing that crowned the place. The reek of the furnace, a sulphurous vapour streaked with pungent bitterness, seemed to make the distant hillside of Hanley quiver. The moon was riding out now from among a drift of clouds, half-way up the sky above the undulating wooded outlines of Newcastle. The steaming canal ran away from below them under an indistinct bridge, and vanished into the dim haze of the flat fields towards Burslem.

"That's the cone I've been telling you of," shouted Horrocks; "and, below that, sixty feet of fire and molten metal, with the air of the blast frothing through it like gas in soda-water."

Raut gripped the hand-rail tightly, and stared down at the cone. The heat was intense. The boiling of the iron and the tumult of the blast made a thunderous accompaniment to Horrocks' voice. But the thing had to be gone through now. Perhaps, after all. . . .

"In the middle," bawled Horrocks, "temperature near a thousand degrees. If *you* were dropped into it . . . flash into flame like a pinch of gunpowder in a candle. Put your hand out and feel the heat of his breath. Why, even up here I've seen the rain-water boiling off the trucks. And that cone there. It's a damned sight too hot for roasting cakes. The top side of it's three hundred degrees."

"Three hundred degrees!" said Raut.

"Three hundred centigrade, mind!" said Horrocks. "It will boil the blood out of you in no time."

"Eigh?" said Raut, and turned.

"Boil the blood out of you in. . . . No, you don't!"

"Let me go!" screamed Raut. "Let go my arm!"

With one hand he clutched at the hand-rail, then with both. For a moment the two men stood swaying. Then suddenly, with a violent jerk, Horrocks had twisted him from his hold. He clutched at Horrocks and missed, his foot went back into empty air; in mid-air he twisted himself, and then cheek and shoulder and knee struck the hot cone together.

He clutched the chain by which the cone hung, and the thing sank an infinitesimal amount as he struck it. A circle of glowing red appeared about him, and a tongue of flame, released from the chaos within, flickered up towards him. An intense pain assailed him at the knees, and he could smell the singeing of his hands. He raised himself to his feet, and tried to climb up the chain, and then something struck his head. Black and shining with the moonlight, the throat of the furnace rose about him.

Horrocks, he saw, stood above him by one of the trucks of fuel on the rail. The gesticulating figure was bright and white in the moonlight, and shouting, "Fizzle, you fool! Fizzle, you hunter of women! You hot-blooded hound! Boil! boil! boil!"

Suddenly he caught up a handful of coal out of the truck, and flung it deliberately, lump after lump, at Raut.

"Horrocks!" cried Raut. "Horrocks!"

He clung crying to the chain, pulling himself up from the burning of the cone. Each missile Horrocks flung hit him. His clothes charred and glowed, and as he struggled the cone dropped, and a rush of hot suffocating gas whooped out and burned round him in a swift breath of flame.

His human likeness departed from him. When the momentary red had passed, Horrocks saw a charred, blackened figure, its head streaked with blood, still clutching and fumbling with the chain, and writhing in agony—a cindery animal, an inhuman, monstrous creature that began a sobbing intermittent shriek.

Abruptly, at the sight, the ironmaster's anger passed. A deadly sickness came upon him. The heavy odour of burning flesh came drifting up to his nostrils. His sanity returned to him.

"God have mercy upon me!" he cried. "O God! what have I done?"

He knew the thing below him, save that it still moved and felt, was already a dead man—that the blood of the poor wretch must be boiling in his veins. An intense realisation of that agony came to his mind, and overcame every other feeling. For a moment he stood irresolute, and then, turning to the truck, he hastily tilted its contents upon the struggling thing that had once been a man. The mass fell with a thud, and went radiating over the cone. With the thud the shriek ended, and a boiling confusion of smoke, dust, and flame came rushing up towards him. As it passed, he saw the cone clear again.

Then he staggered back, and stood trembling, clinging to the rail with both hands. His lips moved, but no words came to them.

Down below was the sound of voices and running steps. The clangour of rolling in the shed ceased abruptly.

Ethel Colburn Mayne

THE SEPARATE ROOM

from COME IN

Chapman & Hall, 1917

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I

It was clear that Bergsma was pleased, and Marion Cameron held her breath in thrilled alarm.

"You've done it—why! you've done it rippingly," said Bergsma, in his intermittent foreign accent, which now made a *w* and *y* precede the *r* in "rippingly." He did not look up, but read on eagerly from the sheet that Marion had typed for him, this morning, before he came into the study. She had felt tired, on waking, after the late evening with its difficult job, and then the exciting sense of having done it not so badly; she had hardly slept a wink, but she was at Bergsma's house much earlier than usual, so that all should be in best array when Bergsma came, and she herself in something that might figure as composure.

"So it was interesting," Bergsma said, still reading. "Miss Grey was in good voice, and Woolley not too—woolly?" He grinned at his mild joke, but still did not look up.

"Miss Grey was splendid," Marion said, in her clear solemn tones; "and Mr. Woolley was . . ." She stopped. She wanted to acknowledge the joke, to say that Mr. Woolley had been something textile, but the word would not present itself, and Marion gave it up. "Mr. Woolley was quite good."

"Loose?" asked Bergsma, with another grin.

"Loose—Mr. Woolley?"

He glanced at her. "The part—it's *quelque peu!* I thought he might have 'given' a bit for once, pulled his voice out . . . ah, *peste*, no more of it!" He frowned.

Marion blushed. She knew she had been slow, and knew that Bergsma hated slowness.

He laid the sheet aside. "It's all right. Send it off." Now he looked up, and at her. "You enjoyed it—the job, I mean?"

"Indeed I did," she answered with the full force of her earnestness.

He turned his thick blue eyes away.

"Like to do it again?"

"If you think I'm worthy . . ." Marion said, a shade more solemnly still.

All at once a different mood seized Bergsma. "Oh, any intelligent person can turn out a notice like that. It wasn't an important production. . . . You've done it very nicely." He took the morning paper; Marion knew she was dismissed to her own table in the corner.

This kind of thing had happened before—the disconcerting change of tone, when she had thought that he was really pleased beyond the ordinary limits of a secretary's "giving-of-satisfaction." Marion did not resent, but she would have liked to understand it. Was it something in him, or in herself, that brought the quick reaction? For she knew, as she had known before, that this was not the mere return to business-manner when the moment for expansion is over. No; he was cross, and about something that was definite, to him.

She put up her article for post—the first words she had ever written for print, and they were to appear, in the foremost musical weekly, not as hers but his. She was Bergsma's "ghost!" Marion, when first she had realized that this was what she was to be, had smiled to herself with the humour of which, for all her lack of wit, she was capable. Bergsma's ghost—a ludicrously dissimilar one! He was short and squat, with a flat, smooth, white face, and thick, prominent, most heavy-lidded eyes that deadened into boredom frankly and alarmingly: "the eyes of genius," somebody had said of them to Marion. Certainly, if that power of extinguishing his eyes were proof of genius, Bergsma had it; and if the other power of lighting so excitedly that they lit up his whole face were further proof, the eyes doubly marked him. That was what made it comic that she should be his ghost. Marion's eyes were large, but that was the most they were. They always looked the same; their brightness was constant—not a luminous brightness, but a mere surface glitter, just enough to rescue them from dulness. They bored her; she despised them heartily. Other things about herself she did not so much mind. She was glad to have her strong white teeth, to be so very tall and not an atom weedy; she could not help thinking, too, that she looked more like "a lady" than most working-girls. (Marion liked to call herself a working-girl, but it annoyed her mother.) She carried herself gallantly, and had adopted the right manner of dress for an impoverished but undeniable gentlewoman, glad and proud to be the hard-working secretary to a leading critic of music—the musical drama, especially. She wore dark, well-cut coats and skirts, and broad, low stiff white collars, and sober hats that had not "too much surface," as her friend, Mrs. Wynne, was fond of saying. Marion didn't know what her friend meant, yet she always contrived to get the kind of hat. It was worn one-sidedly, "crammed" a little; that suited the frank, earnest face with its wide brows and mouth, for it toned down what might have been too much of earnestness. "You look almost piquante," Mrs. Wynne had said. "Not quite—I shouldn't countenance that; it would spoil you."

Marion laughed. "You wouldn't countenance my countenance!"

But Mrs. Wynne did not laugh, and Marion flushed, as she often did when people didn't laugh, as they often didn't. It wasn't a good joke; one saw that when one heard it. . . . She thought of saying *that;* it sounded funny; but perhaps it wouldn't be a good joke, either?

At all events, it was a good joke that she should be Bergsma's ghost. His public, this week, would read *her* devoutly, thinking she was he! And he had known that this was to be so, and yet had ordered her to send it off. . . . She had not believed that she could do it, when Bergsma, harried by a crisis at the theatre where the opera in rehearsal was of his discovery—when he had said: "Look here, Miss Cameron, they want a notice of that Russian operetta at the Yellow on Wednesday night: the International Amateurs, you know. Do you think you could do it? I'm so bothered! It's interesting, though not important. I'd like to give them a word or two this week, but I can't spare the time just now."

Marion had trembled. "Would they take a notice—from *me?*"

"They'll take what I send them," Bergsma said. "How are they to know who wrote it? Do you feel inclined to try?"

His eyes were beginning to deaden. . . . Marion hastened to say something that would show she was not thinking of the sudden evolution of her duties, or was thinking of it as an honour.

"If I only felt sure I could do it," she faltered.

"You know my point of view by this time, and it's only a short notice—anything long would be absurd. . . . It's very good of you, Miss Cameron; we'll regard it as settled that you go and try your hand." He had glanced at her again, a little suspiciously, she thought; so Marion said, "I feel honoured," in her most earnest manner.

He had a shrug and a grunted word for it; she felt again that haunting sense of error. . . . It made her the more ardent when the evening at the Yellow Theatre arrived. Her mind was stretched to fullest tension; the little opera was Russian of the subtlest, all accumulation and intention, expressed in a new, disconcerting scale, "that beats Schônberg," said one of the appalling experts among whom she sat, "into an egg-flip."

Though she did know Bergsma's point of view, it was not an easy task for Marion, writing her first article, to utter it, and so that it would be accepted as his work. For Bergsma had a very special manner. It seemed almost impious to ape it, but what else could he expect of her? and Marion, blushing while she wrote, did ape it: the quivering, suffused attack, the adjectives and adverbs, the conviction and conversion, as in a revivalist campaign—Bergsma's patent, making each experience of the higher musical drama into a vicarious public change of heart; *his* heart, of course, had never been anywhere but in the right scale.

Marion, though elated, was alarmed to find that she could "do" it. Suppose he was angry? That opening—it was like. . . . But if Bergsma had noticed the mimicry, he had said nothing about it; the crossness did not refer to that, she knew. And now she had sent it off—it would appear! Even though he had said it wasn't important, she couldn't help regarding next Saturday as an epoch—she

and her mother, who had sat up for her, that "Yellow" night, with cocoa and biscuits in their bedroom, and at one o'clock in the morning had heard the article, and thought it *exactly* like Mr. Bergsma's own.

Soon Marion was writing all the minor notices, yet the weekly did not lose prestige. It was an astonishing development. All she had had to offer, in the beginning, was her wide acquaintance (it was hardly knowledge, in the deepest sense) with some new developments in foreign music. She had travelled, and (most useful, too) was polyglot in a degree that rivalled even Bergsma, who never used his native language—probably the one he now knew least, for it was Dutch, and Holland has added little to the musical drama. Marion knew Dutch, but that seemed to be one of the things in her that did not please him.

"Ah, Dutch I now speak never," he had said hurriedly, when she told him, and she had noticed with what an unusually foreign idiom he then spoke. Normally he used quite normal English. However, this had not deterred him from engaging her, and she had not again mentioned her acquaintance with Dutch. His vexation was put away among the rest of the puzzlements, once she had thoroughly discussed it with her mother.

Marion discussed everything with her mother. Both were younger than their ages, but while Marion, at twenty-eight, showed merely a retarded maturity, Mrs. Cameron was of the type that never does grow up. She was not "well-preserved"; her hair was grey, her small pink face was frankly though quite prettily wrinkled and withered; she was, in short, the confessed old lady who is a little self-consciously a child. True to her type, she held herself to be a deep diplomatist; Marion believed this of her too—she had been nurtured in the faith. Thus they could, with zest and a tinge of vanity on Mrs. Cameron's part, sit arguing for hours and hours about other people's reasons for being or doing this or that. They would turn an incident round and round, and up and down; then Mrs. Cameron would bring forth an explanation which lately, now and then, had seemed to Marion a little superannuated. She would laugh her big, whole-hearted laugh. "Oh, mother, that's *your* generation!"—and Mrs. Cameron, though offended, would laugh too, and declare that Marion was now leading such a free life that no doubt she must know better, but "that would have been the reason when I was a girl."

In this way the repulse of Dutch had been explained. "He must have been dissatisfied with a former secretary who spoke it. That was it, you may be sure."

"Or perhaps," cried Marion the emancipate, "he was in *love* with a secretary who spoke it. That could account for his nervousness, too."

"But, Marion, Mr. Bergsma is married."

"*Ça n'empêche pas,*" Marion smiled.

Mrs. Cameron pondered the smile. Marion was growing; her mother must grow with her.

"Will he fall in love with *you*, I wonder?" she said, archly.

Marion rose up from her chair. They were in their private hotel's drawing-room, quite alone together; everybody else preferred the lounge.

"*Mother!* If you ever say that again . . ."

Mrs. Cameron's little face at once took on a rosy obstinacy.

"I don't see why you fly at me, Marion. You said it first."

"I! Say such a thing about myself and . . . and Mr. Bergsma! I'm a useful servant to him, that's all."

"So would the other one have been."

Marion gasped. "The 'other one!' " For a moment she could not say any more.

Her mother became injured. "I see nothing dreadful in calling another secretary 'the other one.' And please don't speak of yourself as a servant, Marion; there's no need to do that, if you *are* working for a salary."

Marion sat down again. "I am a servant, and I'm not ashamed of it."

"You are an accomplished lady, who makes use of her talent to help a busy man—not of course a gentleman, but . . ."

" 'Not a gentleman,' " Marion gasped again.

"Do not repeat every word I say." Mrs. Cameron was calm, but her little fallen-in, pink mouth was closely set. "Mr. Bergsma is very clever, but you must know as well as I do that he is *not* a gentleman, in the way your father was, and Neil is."

"He's foreign," Marion panted. She had only just saved herself from echoing "Neil!" Neil *liked* Bergsma; he had said so when he met him before going out again to India.

"You are used to foreigners," continued Mrs. Cameron. "You know that the Count and M. de la Vigne and Herr von Adelbert were not a bit like Mr. Bergsma. He may be very courteous to you; I have no doubt he is, but his manners to *me* . . ."

And all this because Bergsma had omitted to open a door, the other day, for Mrs. Cameron! He had been talking so eagerly that he hadn't seen her get up. Marion did not speak; she could do nothing but echo if she spoke. The Count—horrid old M. de la Vigne—manners. . . .

"It is time to go to bed," said Mrs. Cameron, cheerfully, as if nothing had happened. That was her tact, the famous tact which had carried her—and Neil and Marion—through so many difficulties. Marion wondered why she hated it, now that it was being exercised upon herself. But mother had forgotten it when she spoke of Mr. Bergsma as not being a gentleman. A cloud obscured the earnest face, as she followed Mrs. Cameron upstairs, and wished, for the first time in all her life, that they could afford to have separate bedrooms.

She said much less about her work from that time forward. It grew more and more exacting; there were few nights now on which she was not out at concerts, for Bergsma was devoting himself to musical drama: he found it more inspiring for his gifts of exposition. It was clear that Marion's efforts pleased him; and yet his crossness grew more pronounced, more constant—not rudeness, but a curious coolness and aloofness, as it were a watchfulness. And since now she did not talk about it with her mother, it seemed the more oppressive, even sinister. Her mother did not ask the questions Marion had expected, and would perhaps have welcomed; they might have eased the dual strain. The strain was dual be-

cause Mrs. Cameron, too, was often cool now about little things—the cocoa, for example. It was always there when Marion came in late, but there with an effect of duty, not of glad excited revel, as on that first night. Marion sometimes felt a strange depression. Life seemed altered; though outwardly more exhilarating, it was inwardly less happy. Her toil was not the cause—*that* grew more dear and glorious every day. No one could have told her articles from Bergsma's now, and still he didn't seem to notice, or if he did, he liked it, to judge by the opportunities he gave her.

One day, Mrs. Wynne said something which infuriated Marion. "What's your salary now? I suppose it's a good deal bigger."

There fell an almost tangible silence. It was as if something they had waited for had happened. . . . Marion looked at her friend. Mrs. Wynne was not looking at Marion, but her eyes had just met Mrs. Cameron's, and Marion caught the gleam. She felt her own eyes flash.

"My salary remains the same."

There was another little silence; then Mrs. Wynne said, "Well done, Bergsma!"

"What do you mean?" cried Marion, choking.

Mrs. Cameron intervened at that point; she said something about "on probation."

"Rather a long probation," Mrs. Wynne observed.

Marion got up. Her voice was gone, her eyes did not flash now, but dimmed with sudden, smarting tears. She stood a moment, looking at the others, then hurried from the room.

So that was what her mother had been plotting. She had asked Mrs. Wynne to say something; the meeting of their eyes betrayed it. . . . When one was being given such a chance! If Bergsma knew, he wouldn't think so highly of his lady-secretary. Rather common, a sordid rise, as if she were indeed a servant! That was just the difference it made, to be a lady. But mother was a lady too, if Mrs. Wynne was a little too shrewd to be "quite-quite. . . ." However, there was no time to worry about it; she had a bigger job to-night than she had ever had before—a symphony, a Danish one, produced by a Society on their special Sunday night for the innermost circle (Bergsma was out of town). She must keep fit for that. And supper—Sunday supper here, with her mother! Could she stand it? All the time that hateful incident would hover, of the eyes that met and parted furtively. . . . No; she couldn't go through supper.

When Mrs. Cameron came up to change her dress, she found a note upon the pin-cushion. Marion was supping at a little restaurant, "quite nice and respectable," close to the hall where her job lay; she would be home at the usual hour.

Her mother was asleep, or seemed to be asleep, when she came in. There was no cocoa.

2

Quite without warning it came—the letter in which Bergsma said he had decided to dispense with a secretary for the present.

Marion read it at breakfast. She managed not to cry out; if she turned white, nobody saw her, in the pre-occupation with their food which, at breakfast especially, was a source of continual unrest among the boarders. She put the letter in her belt, and blindly took a plate displaying a poached egg. Marion cut her egg mechanically; it flowed over the toast, and something in the sight made her feel sick. . . . She would have to tell her mother after breakfast. It would be dreadful; her mother would gush out, like the egg. But the thing could not be hidden: better get it told as soon as possible.

"Come up to our room a moment, mother, before you read the paper," Marion said, when Mrs. Cameron had finished. She had smuggled her own streaming plate away, before it could be noticed that she had not touched the egg except to cut it.

"Are you staying in this morning, then?" Mrs. Cameron said, wondering.

"Yes," Marion answered, and a bitter wave of woe swept into her. She would be staying in all mornings now. . . . She mounted the steep stairs before her mother, the distress increasing as she went, until at the last landing (for their room was at the very top) she broke down, and stood with her face hidden, trembling.

"What's the matter?" Mrs. Cameron called sharply from the flight below; she had seen through the balusters.

Without answering, Marion went into their room. When the little staring face appeared, she silently held out the letter.

Mrs. Cameron began to read. Almost as soon as she began, her daughter broke out crying—weakly, the sound muffled by her covering hands.

"What is it, mother, what can I have done? Oh, tell me, tell me!" Marion sobbed.

"Don't cry, Marion," Mrs. Cameron said quickly. "Whatever you do, don't cry."

She was feeling for a prop to clutch at—there was nothing but their pride: they must not cry. That man, whom she had always thought so common—*that* man had done this to them! She dropped the letter; Bergsma's cheque fell out. Money—his . . . she could have stamped upon the cheque.

"Oh, Marion, *do not* cry. Remember what you are—and what he is!" she added fiercely. But the fierceness died. Soon she was crying too, because she could not bear to cry. Their sobs were audible outside, for Mrs. Cameron had forgotten to shut the door; a sloppy servant came and stared into the room. It had not been "done" yet, and the girl's face grew sulky—now they'd stop her doing it, and she was to get out so soon as she had finished upstairs.

Mrs. Cameron went to the door, and locked it. "I saw that horrid Annie staring in," she gulped. Then she did not know what to say. Annie would be cross

if they delayed her, and Annie could make a lot of difference to the boarders' comfort. But Marion would certainly not be able to come downstairs for some time yet. She had thrown herself upon her unmade bed; her sobs grew deeper every minute. Mrs. Cameron had never, since the baby-years, heard Marion cry until to-day.

"Oh, mother, tell me what I can have done," she kept on moaning.

Was it not an occasion for the tact?

"I believe," said Mrs. Cameron, "that you were getting to write so well that he was jealous."

But Marion only groaned. "Oh, mother!" on a different note of anguish.

"Mrs. Wynne says your articles really seem like making fun of him sometimes—they are so like."

"Mrs. Wynne!"

"She was your idol, Marion, before . . . all this."

The tact seemed to be working, for Marion suddenly sat up. Her face was blurred, but it could show that she was cross, her mother thought—and then she saw that Marion was not cross, but desperate.

"It's no use," said Marion. "There's no good talking about it. The servant is dismissed, with a quarter's salary in lieu of notice."

Mrs. Cameron's eyes burned. "Extra salary! How dare he?"

"I'll throw his cheque back in his face," the girl said, getting off the bed.

"Not in his *face*, Marion—you wouldn't go there?"

"Mother!" Marion groaned again. . . .

They were hunted from their room at last, for Annie knocked at the door violently. Mrs. Cameron put on her hat before she yielded; she was going out to do some shopping, for she couldn't settle to the morning paper now. When she came back, in half-an-hour, Marion still was sitting at a table in the drawing-room, her face buried in her hands, as she had been when Mrs. Cameron had left her. . . . It all began again, and through the whole day it went on. The letter to Bergsma must be written—a dignified, ladylike letter. Marion made draft upon draft: they were not torn up as they accumulated, for in each there was a phrase that seemed essential to her solace—one of gratitude, of meek reproach, of sad affection. But to every phrase like this, her mother objected. "No, not that, Marion—please, not *that*."

So it went on, and they got crosser and crosser. Tea in their bedroom—their own China tea—was the one change from the hot, dingy, saddle-backed drawing-room. The house-tea was in the lounge as usual; they rarely went down. This hotel was their poverty's consent—a place so typical of its kind as to be almost mythical; no aggravation of the cheap private hotel's horrors was absent. But tea in their room did not refresh them. They drank cups down like poison-cups; Marion could "touch nothing," though Mrs. Cameron had specially, that morning, bought some favourite and expensive cakes. Would to-morrow be as bad, the older woman wondered. At any rate, the letter would be sent by then, and Marion might pick up some courage after it had gone.

After dinner Mrs. Wynne came in. The final draft had not been written yet, and they had lingered in the lounge—each shrinking from renewal.

"Shall we tell her?" Mrs. Cameron said in a whisper, as Mrs. Wynne came towards them, threading her way among the chairs.

"Just as you like," said Marion, weakly. "She'll have to know some day."

But in her heart she knew that she desired to tell. Despite that incident about the salary, Marion still liked Mrs. Wynne. With her much wider knowledge of the world she might throw light on Bergsma's action, and anyhow one couldn't talk or think of any other subject. Mrs. Cameron, on her side, wanted to hear Bergsma blamed "as he deserved"; so eagerly they welcomed Mrs. Wynne, and quickly transferred her and themselves to the drawing-room.

"You can smoke there—nobody ever enters it but ourselves," Mrs. Cameron assured her.

Sunk in the saddle-back Chesterfield with her cigarette, Mrs. Wynne sat listening. Her expressive monkey-face said more than she did, for at first she only murmured sympathetically. But Marion, watching her face, asked suddenly, "Have you ever heard that Mr. Bergsma was . . . was given to dismissing secretaries without notice?" She laughed—a wretched little laugh, most sadly changed from the big note of other days.

Mrs. Wynne said, "Not exactly that."

"Then what?" said Marion.

"I may as well tell you. He is a 'woman's man,' they say; attractive to women, I mean. I shouldn't have supposed so, but that's his reputation. And there's a Mrs. Bergsma, you see. Have you ever met her?"

"She has come into the study once or twice," said Marion coldly, and wished she had not asked her question.

"She may be jealous."

"Jealous—of *me!*"

"Not of you personally. It's common enough, you know, with these men's wives."

"But Mr. Bergsma never . . ."

Mrs. Cameron interrupted Marion. "You said it yourself."

"Said what, mother?"

"That he might have been in love with the other one who spoke Dutch. You know he did, Marion."

Marion saw a smile—at once repressed—break on the visitor's lips. But there was no stopping Mrs. Cameron; the Dutch episode was told, with "*Marion's*" explanation of it, and in that vein the dialogue developed, while Marion sat and writhed. There was a transition to the other theory of jealousy—Bergsma's jealousy of the articles. Mrs. Wynne rejected it.

"A writer with . . . with *his* sort of style" (Marion wondered what that meant) "would never notice."

There were no more smiles, no looks exchanged with Mrs. Cameron, yet Mrs. Wynne preserved an air of knowing something that they didn't know. Soon she went away, a little bored perhaps, for they had talked of nothing else. Then

Mrs. Cameron and Marion went to bed, the letter still unwritten. Mrs. Wynne had said there was no hurry; Bergsma would anticipate a short delay. It galled Mrs. Cameron—she would have liked to finish with him; but Marion seemed relieved, and indeed neither could have faced an evening like the day. So they went up to bed, quite early.

. . . A separate room—a room in which she could have cried herself to sleep! But Marion must be quiet every night—there never would be one when she might cry.

Soon after the candle was put out, her mother spoke.

"Are you awake, Marion? Mrs. Wynne thinks you're in love with Mr. Bergsma, I am sure."

No answer from the other bed.

"You're not asleep; I heard you move the pillow. . . . That's what she thinks. I never liked her, but she was your friend, so I said nothing. After all, I daresay it's a blessing the connection is ended. Anything that gives rise to gossip. . . . I should have thought of that; I blame myself. However, it's all over now, and Neil need never know how it happened. We can let him think that the work had got too hard for you, as indeed I think it had. And with no rise in salary! Do you remember how Mrs. Wynne remarked on that?"

But her voice had got drowsy; soon she was asleep. Marion for a long while did not dare to move. She lay, like a dead body, stiff and straight; and thought how like she was to one, except that the dead body *would* be dead. It would not wake next morning, and the morning after that, nor go to bed next night and lie so still because it feared to set its mother talking of how it was believed to be in love with Mr. Bergsma, but how Neil need never know.

Miss Cameron had been working too hard, Dr. Ferguson said; she would have had to take a long rest anyhow—she could not have gone on at that rate.

Marion peered at him suspiciously, and found him peering in a similar way at her. He was a good-looking pompous man, her mother's contemporary. Marion felt that he would be on her mother's side. She could not have accounted for the feeling, nor till now would it have come to her—there had been no "sides" till now. But as he peered at her, she found herself reflecting: "*He'll* call mother wonderful, too, like Colonel Morris and the Admiral." Though Dr. Ferguson had attended the Camerons for years, he knew nothing of their lives except their ailments and their poverty; he now was obviously impressed when he heard that Marion had been working with Bergsma. It was his foible to be up-to-date, as he still called it; Bergsma's work appealed to him—there had been a new Scriabin piece lately: "the Theosophical School," said Dr. Ferguson, with pride, looking at Marion more respectfully. "Exacting work, no doubt, yours must have been."

"I was only his secretary," Marion said.

"'*Only!*'" said Mrs. Cameron. She was standing, very upright, at the foot of the bed, gazing pathetically from the doctor's face to Marion's, like a child who knew that it was like a child.

Marion groaned. "Be quiet, mother"; and at the same instant her conviction of the doctor's partisanship changed. He was on her side! He had been peering

at her still more closely, but when Mrs. Cameron spoke he turned his head and peered at *her*. His eyes lit up with a quick gleam; he prevented Mrs. Cameron from going on by going on himself with animation, ordaining change of air as soon as Marion was well enough ("and rich enough," said Marion, but he took no notice); in the meantime she was to see her friends, not read nor write at all, not brood, but look forward instead of backwards, make the best of life. . . .

Marion lay and listened. She knew what would happen when her mother and the doctor left the bedroom. He would be told about the extra work, and the not-extra salary, and her too faithful mimicry of Bergsma's style. Perhaps he would not be told of Mrs. Wynne's imputed theory, but she wasn't sure: mother was so . . . so *foolish!* That was the amazing word that came to her, and Marion's thoughts diverged. Her mother foolish—she who had done such marvels with her tact, who had carried her big son and her big daughter on its shoulders, as it were. "Minnie Cameron's a wonderful woman." Had there ever been a Colonel or an Admiral, among their large acquaintance in the sort, who had not at some time said that to Marion? And Neil too: he was always saying how wonderful mother was . . . *was* she?

Outside the door she heard them whispering. Why didn't her mother take the doctor to the ever-empty drawing-room? *He* couldn't know there was a place that they might, practically, call their own sitting-room, but Mrs. Cameron knew it; and wasn't whispering supposed to be the thing most fatal to a patient's nerves? "No rise in her salary": she could have sworn she caught the words. There could be no need to tell him that; the work would have been just as hard if she *had* had the bigger salary. But it was vain to torment one's-self; mother always did what she "thought right." And as Marion lay and strained her ears, the certainty grew stronger that Mrs. Cameron would put the other view before him—the view that Marion might have been in love with Bergsma. She would think that, also, right. Perhaps it was; perhaps a doctor should be told such things about a helpless, useless daughter who would be a burden again now, instead of a bread-winner. And she had been so proud of earning her own living! Hot tears ran down her cheeks. As a secretary pure and simple, she would not have broken down. It was the hard work, late hours, excitement, mental strain, and—and Bergsma's growing crossness and aloofness, his avoidance of her, even while he used her; the thick eyes that had not flashed for *her* this many a day, but always deadened, deadened more and more with each infrequent interview. How she had watched to see the eyes light up, the way they used, when she had "done" some concert more capably than usual—and the eyes never had, though still he sent her: "in case there should be something startling that I'd better do myself, and then I can write-up your article." That had meant that she must take even more pains than usual, lest Bergsma be "let down," and ignore a masterpiece. But Marion had not minded, or would not have minded, if . . . And then had come the letter.

They had not sent back the cheque. Mrs. Wynne had said it would be futile and undignified; they couldn't bandy money about—Bergsma would insist, it would be horribly uncomfortable; and the "salary in lieu of notice" *was* the

proper thing for him to do. So a colourless letter had gone, in which the phrases of affection and reproach were all left out. It had had the effect of making Bergsma write again, holding forth vague hopes that some day he would be able to resume Miss Cameron's "invaluable services." There had been discussions on what he meant by that. Marion said, "Nothing"; Mrs. Cameron (commenting with much sarcasm on *invaluable*) hoped so, but was afraid he did mean something. That went on for days and nights; inspirations on what Bergsma meant would flock in the darkness. . . . But the breakdown had mercifully come at last, and had done this for Marion—she might cry in her bed now. It was called part of her illness. Without the illness, another explanation of her melancholy had been showing itself as imminent. "I shall begin to think that your friend Mrs. Wynne was right."

Those words had been said one day, in a flurry of temper, at tea-time. Marion could go out of the room then; but if they should be said and added to, at night, when the candle was extinguished. . . .

Mrs. Cameron came back, brisk and brave and pathetic.

"The doctor thinks we shall have rain at last. I'm glad for your sake, Marion; this room gets so hot. The sun is cheerful, but the rain will make things fresh again."

"Did you talk about the weather all that time?" asked Marion.

"Of course we talked of you a little; he had to tell me about your diet. But, Marion, dear, you know there are other things in the world besides your trouble."

"Oh yes—the weather," Marion said.

"Invalids are *never* told what the doctor says about them. You must not be unreasonable, Marion."

Marion fixed her eyes upon the little face, like a ventriloquist's puppet's face. It looked back at her, and the lips drew together, with a kind of peevish patience. "You've been crying. The doctor says (as you insist on being told what he says) that I mustn't let you cry, on any account."

"Then of course you mustn't, mother. How are you going to stop me? Shall I tell you what I was crying about? It was about never being alone. I'm going to ask the doctor to order me a separate bedroom. The extra-quarter's salary will pay for it. It will do me more good than any other change."

Mrs. Cameron began to cry.

"Oh, mother, that's not tactful, is it, showing me a bad example?" Marion loathed herself, yet could not stop. It was too much for her—the triple wreck, of herself and Bergsma and her mother.

The doctor would not order the separate room. He gave all sorts of unconvincing reasons, very cheerily. Marion lay and looked at him.

"I shall torment myself till I find out the real reason," she said. "Will that be good for me?"

He laughed. "You have far too much intelligence, Miss Cameron. *You* won't waste your mental strength like that."

"I have no use for my intelligence," said Marion. "I have no use for my mental strength. One way of wasting them is as good as another."

"Oh, nonsense, nonsense!" laughed the doctor. "What you've got to do is to get well, and then see if you haven't a use for them. Mr. Bergsma's not the only busy man who needs a secretary."

A cunning look came in Marion's face. "And *he* may 'resume my invaluable services,'" she said, fixing her eyes on her mother.

Mrs. Cameron winced, but she stood bravely up to Marion's eyes. "Well, all right, darling, if he does." She smiled pathetically.

The cunning look died out. "I'm not mad, I tell you both!" cried Marion.

The doctor took her wrist between his fingers. "What put *that* brilliant idea into your head, may I inquire?"

"You two!" Marion shrieked, and tore her wrist away. "You two think I am. That's why *you* won't let me have a room to myself, and that's why mother grins and pretends she wouldn't rather die than ever let me work again for Mr. Bergsma. She hated him, you know," she told the doctor in a sudden mood of confidence, "and all because he forgot to open the drawing-room door for her one day!" She sank back on the pillow. "That was why, just *that*"; and she began to sob and moan. . . .

But as time went on, she did get better. Her strength came back, and with it, self-control. It was not often now that she sneered at, or "flew at," her mother; she only lay and watched her, with a smile. Mrs. Cameron did not like the smile, but she avoided looking—it was the most tactful thing to do. And when Marion got better and could be up, and better still and could come out for little walks, the smile, though it was there sometimes, was not so frequent. It, like the crying, had been part of her illness, and *that* was nearly over; the smile would disappear when all the illness did, and everything would be as it had been before, except that the horrid Bergsma connection would be done with. Neil need never know that Marion had, for a while, been so—so overstrained that Dr. Ferguson had warned Mrs. Cameron not to let her be alone even for a moment. Neil need never know, and that was all that mattered. . . . She looked at Marion complacently, one day in Kensington Gardens; but instantly she looked away again. Marion's eyes were fixed on her; the smile was there.

"You're a wonderful woman, mother," Marion said. "You've got me over it."

"Over what, Marion?" Mrs. Cameron faltered, off her guard.

"My passion for Mr. Bergsma."

"Don't be wicked!" the old woman exclaimed. Marion was nearly well now; there was no need to humour her to this extent.

"And my suicidal tendency, too," continued Marion. "I wonder which I ought to be most grateful for. Which do *you* think?"

"I am not aware that either of those things was the matter with you, I assure you, Marion, and neither is Dr. Ferguson. You exaggerate your illness absurdly."

"You and Dr. Ferguson exaggerated it too, then. I often heard you both; I was able to get out of bed, you know. I always thought you should have taken him down to the drawing-room instead of whispering outside my door, but it didn't seem to occur to you, and as it was convenient to me, I said nothing. . . . Well,

mother, if I can't believe in your wisdom any more, I *can* believe in your pluck. It's just as good; I don't know that it isn't better. But I hope you didn't tell anyone besides the doctor that I was in love with Mr. Bergsma."

The little puppet-face was convulsed in the effort not to cry. "I never could have dreamed that my daughter would *listen*."

"I was mad, you see."

"You were not, Marion, so don't bring that up as an excuse. You were *not* mad, only overstrained. You exaggerate everything. I only told the doctor what your own friend, Mrs. Wynne, had said—or what she thought, at any rate. I never thought so myself."

"You should have thought so, mother. It was true. That was why he dismissed me. He didn't want his secretary to have a passion for him."

"Don't use that wicked word! And about that man, with his flat face and horrid collars—they were never clean."

"Oh yes, they were clean, but they were lower than the men *you* know would wear. That's all, mother. . . . I used to watch for a look from the flat face—was it flat? I suppose so. I only saw his eyes." She spoke in a deep musing tone, with no smile now; she had forgotten her mother.

Mrs. Cameron stood up. "It's nearly lunch-time."

The girl looked at her again. "Won't you let me talk about my passion, a little now and then?"

"Oh, Marion," the other moaned, returning. "How can you torment me so? It's cruel of you!" She sat down again. "You frighten me, indeed you do." Her voice shattered into sobs.

The girl sat unmoved. "We're like two dead bodies tied together. We don't love each other any more, yet we must be for ever side by side. . . . I think I won't forgive you for curing the tendency to suicide, mother. The passion's different—I can brood on that. I can think of his flat face, and wonder why a man with a flat face was not more flattered—there's a joke. But he's a woman's man, isn't he? He's tired of passionate secretaries, I suppose. That *was* why he snubbed my Dutch; it would have been dangerous to speak in his own language with a yearning secretary—"

Mrs. Cameron got up again, her pink cheeks glistening. "I won't listen to you. It's disgraceful—that's what it is. You ought to be ashamed."

"Haven't I been ashamed enough? Let me glory in my shame now, for a change." She got up too. "Come home to lunch, mother. Tuesday . . . it will be mutton-hash to-day, and treacle-pudding. That will be so nice; we'll easily forget this painful scene. Yes, let's go—home."

Mrs. Cameron pointed out the beauty of the autumn tints as they went through the Gardens. Marion looked at each example; then looked at her mother, with the smile.

3

That phase also passed. Marion felt abominable while it lasted; it was like sticking daggers into a doll, and the daggers hurt this doll. They made no difference, moreover; Mrs. Cameron said the same kind of things between-times.

Mother and daughter went away together for their change of air, returned, and Marion was nearly well. The doctor still came sometimes, but now as though he were a friend, vigilant and interested. He seemed, as she had felt before, to be Marion's friend rather than her mother's; but Marion did not care; she cared for nothing. In the passage of the months her bitterness had grown beneath the outward self-control; she had one watchword now—concealment of all feeling. "Feel nothing, but if you must feel hide it—hide everything about you, all you think and are." It became a trial of skill. She paid visits with her mother, watching for good opportunities for lies about herself, especially the lie of being lazy, glad to cease breadwinning and be entirely dependent, hanging as it were upon her mother's arm like a spoilt child.

Mrs. Cameron's friends began to disapprove; Marion perceived it, fostered it. The plan of the Minnie party was that Marion now should teach the many languages—such work could always be procured. Marion refused to try for pupils, not saying that she liked best to be lazy—that would have spoilt the game. She let it be inferred, amid glances of concern at the sad change in her.

The glances of concern pleased Mrs. Cameron. They made her feel a wonderful woman again. During the later Bergsma period there had been a certain obscuration—Marion had been so prominent with her "inside" knowledge of musical events, her acquaintance with the *virtuosi*, her own remarkable development in capacity and self-reliance. But now people saw again that Minnie was the heroine, with her bravery and cheer, her patience with the lazy daughter. She loved to take the lazy daughter out to tea, to come into a room thus followed, and display her pluck and tact. But as the months drew out and she felt firmer on the pedestal, an insidious change began. At some houses there would sound again a note of interest in Marion rather than in Minnie.

Mrs. Wynne's was one of these. The dark monkey-face would turn and dwell, observing silently but intently taking in. She would talk about music, that inhibited topic on which Marion, lamentably and surprisingly, still enjoyed to talk. Tactless of Mrs. Wynne! It brought the whole thing up again—the buried past, with all its mystery and invidiousness; and besides, "Marion would never try for pupils, while she was encouraged to remember those horrible days," said Mrs. Cameron to her friends.

Mrs. Wynne's Irish maid was another grievance. This little creature was "positively insulting" to Mrs. Cameron, one day soon after the return to London. It happened thus. Marion and her mother entered, and put down their umbrellas—Mrs. Cameron thrusting hers into the stand, Marion propping hers against the table. Bridget (she had an engaging cast in her right eye) gave swimming Irish looks at Marion, whose height and "style" she openly admired—she was far too

free with both her eyes and tongue. Then she went towards the stairs, with no admiring glance for Mrs. Cameron, who had on a new grey toque. Marion, undelayed by the small difficulty of getting an umbrella neatly into the narrow stand, had begun to ascend at Bridget's heels, conversing with her.

Suddenly Mrs. Cameron called out: "Come back here, Marion."

The two on the stairs stopped short.

"Come back and put your umbrella in the proper place."

"Oh, ma'am, it doesn't matter," Bridget cried. "The mistress never—"

"Come back here, Marion." The face under the new toque was scarlet.

Marion, pale and silent, stood still on the stairs. Her eyes were dreadful. For an instant they met Bridget's.

"Do you hear what I say?" the voice below vibrated shrilly.

"For heaven's sake, mother . . ." Marion gasped, and came down from the stairs. She went by her mother, and put her umbrella into the stand.

"Oh, miss; oh, ma'am!" breathed Bridget, almost crying—but Mrs. Cameron was now on Marion's stair, and was looking at her angrily. Bridget gulped, and went on to the drawing-room door. Her voice broke as she announced them. Mrs. Cameron pushed by her haughtily; Marion. . . . Bridget never knew what Marion did, except that she did not break down, nor speak to Bridget, nor look angry, but—

"Oh, ma'am," said Bridget, choking, to her mistress, "it was awful! As if Mrs. Cameron wanted to shame her before me, turning her into a child like that. The umbrella—Miss Cameron went down and put it in the stand; I could hardly keep quiet when I saw her face. She'll go mad, ma'am, if she can't get away from her mother."

Bridget's agitation was so great that Mrs. Wynne, though she too thought it "awful," tried to calm the girl and herself by saying that there was really nothing in it.

"Oh yes, ma'am, there was, and you'd know if you'd seen it. The way Mrs. Cameron looked at her—you wouldn't believe the wickedness of it."

"Nonsense; you're fond of Miss Cameron; you exaggerate."

"It's well someone's fond of her. You are yourself, ma'am. Is there no way you could get her away from that old—"

But this was decidedly too much; Mrs. Wynne dismissed the girl. She sat thinking. She had long perceived the trouble. The mother's jealousy—innate and ineradicable—never roused by Marion till the Bergsma phase, and then appeased by the dismissal, now again was quickened by her daughter's attitude. If Marion's friends should show more interest in that than in the mother's pluck and patience, the jealousy would crouch, a-stretch like a wild beast that sees its prey; and ah, that prey was visible! The daughter's pride—what a long feasting meal. . . . One knew such moods in these undeveloped women, these old children, with the cruelty and blindness of a child, but not the child's inconsequence. No; the feast once begun, the wild beast would drive out the child; its prey would not be loosened till consumed. "And one can do not one least thing to save—unless indeed one should abandon Marion, and join with Mrs. Cameron! Shall I

urge the poor girl to the teaching that she shrinks from? It might help; I'll try it."

When Mrs. Wynne next went to see them, in pursuance of her scheme, she found a message from the Bergsma quarter so absorbing Mrs. Cameron that even *she*—now almost openly cold-shouldered—was called into council.

The message had taken the shape of a visiting-card—Mrs. Bergsma's, intimating change of address. It had come to Mrs. Cameron, not to Marion.

"Now what ought we to do?"

"Take no notice," Mrs. Wynne said, at a venture. She had not yet surveyed the ground, but it seemed probable that this would please.

It did not please, and as that showed, the visitor began to see the rest. Marion sat by, silent. Not even by a look did she confess herself, but Mrs. Wynne's nerves shuddered for her.

"There's nothing in it," Mrs. Wynne continued. "Mrs. Bergsma just went through her address-book, or someone else did for her, more likely. They'll not expect a call."

The argument began, went on; and Mrs. Wynne knew horror. All cruelty seemed in it, all base vengeance, all that once meant woman; each word seemed chosen to retaliate for that brief spell of bliss and glory; yet as the listener looked into the little face, she told herself that she, like Bridget, was imputing that which was not in its owner's competence. This could be only sheer stupidity; the worst evil was not there. But then again some glance, some word, abominable, would upset the milder judgment.

"What does Marion say?" her friend broke out at last, unable longer to fight single-handed. She turned to the dumb girl and saw her quiver momentarily, then constrain herself to sit impassive as before. But it were kindlier to force her speech, and Mrs. Wynne persisted.

"Tell *me*, Marion," she entreated, casting aside caution, putting all her friendship into the low tone. It was as if she challenged the fell mother for the daughter's voice. No answer came. The girl's eyes met hers for an instant, and she caught her breath. What a look—what weary wastes of suffering. . . . And yet the thing was trivial—almost certainly, a mere card-leaving: they would not be admitted; no one ever was at home on chance, in London. But Mrs. Wynne could understand the girl's repugnance.

"I can't see why Marion should be with you, if you wish to go," she repeated, for this had been of course the first thing she had said.

"It is only through her that I ever knew these people"—yes, the tone, the look. . . . "It is for *her* sake that I wish to go."

"But if she doesn't want it?"

"Such morbid nonsense! 'Hanging round the house,' she calls it. I think it is we who confer the favour by calling."

But as if this, in its absurdity, were the breaking-point, Marion spoke at last.

"Mother has never consented to recognize Mr. Bergsma as a social being. He's only a common little man with a crushed collar to her. 'No one' goes to his

house; 'no one' knows the Bergsmas." She smiled—the old smile which once had frightened Mrs. Cameron, but now had lost its power.

"I don't profess to understand the society in which people like the Bergsmas move. I leave that to you . . . and your friends."

There was a silence.

"*Could* you, Marion?" Mrs. Wynne then murmured. "Could you go, I mean. It wouldn't be a case of getting in, I'm sure."

Marion, having spoken at all, seemed to have abandoned wholly her new attitude, for she gave her friend an overwhelming answer. "I could go, but I won't. I won't be dragged *there* at mother's chariot-wheels." She stood up. "Now you know, mother. I dare say you'll say you don't understand, but I'll explain another time. Don't drag Mrs. Wynne into a scene like this morning's. She wouldn't like it. Let her off the rest."

But the teeth were firm in the flesh now, and Mrs. Wynne heard all the rest. She heard that Marion was still absurdly "sorry for herself" and that her friends encouraged her, while Mrs. Cameron's were more and more disgusted every day; that "that man" would imagine, if no one else did, all that their omission to call might signify; that indeed his wife could not be blamed if she had been suspicious, and her card was intended for a delicate hint that, having nipped the thing in the bud, she was prepared to resume a friendly acquaintance. "Anything more disgusting, more indecent, than Marion's whole behaviour since that man cast her off. . . ."

And Marion stood and heard, without the smile, and said at last in a pause: "The most devoted and most tactful mother, you can see—and Mrs. Bergsma is to see. How do you know I haven't been 'hanging round the house' in secret, mother? Mr. Bergsma cast me off, as you say, but men do that and women hang about them, still. Perhaps that's why I stick at going to call—how do you know it isn't?"

But this was a bad slip.

"I know," said Mrs. Cameron, "because I've never let you out of my sight for a single instant, and never intend to."

Mrs. Wynne saw Marion pale at that. She exclaimed after a moment: "But Dr. Ferguson said yesterday that I'm to have a room to myself, in future. They're getting it ready now; you know they are." Her voice was harsh with fear.

"They're not getting it ready. I countermanded it, after this morning's 'scene,' as you call it."

The girl sank on a chair. Her face was terrible to see, but Mrs. Wynne did not see it—she had hidden her own. She sat, crumpled into a heap, in her corner of the sofa. Marion looked at her, then at her mother. Mrs. Cameron was by the tea-table; she was picking biscuits from a plate and nibbling at them, and then dropping them; her face was red and angry, but exultant.

"Look at Mrs. Wynne, mother," Marion said at last, in the old languid tone. "She seems distressed. It's not a pretty scene. We ought to let her go."

Mrs. Wynne sprang up. "I'm going. I can't stand it. You two should be entirely apart—it's monstrous. Is there no one who could take you, Marion, for a

while? *I* will, if you like. I can't stand by and let this be—it's not safe; I feel responsible. . . . Let her come to me!" She turned to the mother, speaking gently now: she had regained her self-control.

Mrs. Cameron, a biscuit at her lips, laughed slightingly. Her voice took a vile note as she replied: "I'll keep my unfortunate daughter, thank you."

"Then some day you'll have to keep her in a mad-house," Mrs. Wynne exclaimed, once more forgetting prudence.

"That's no worse than the kind of house *you'd* keep her in."

Mrs. Wynne did not hear; she was looking at Marion, who had got up again "Stop!" she cried.

But Marion laughed, and threw the biscuit-plate—now empty—in her mother's face.

It grazed the skin, that was all. Mrs. Cameron wept, Marion stood and laughed. Mrs. Wynne took out her handkerchief to stop the blood. The plate lay whole upon the floor some distance off; it had fallen into a thick woolly rug. The blood soon ceased—it was the merest graze; Marion stopped laughing; and Mrs. Wynne escaped. There was nothing she could do, except go to Dr. Ferguson. He must insist upon the separate room, at any rate.

She went, straight from the hotel—she found him in and told her tale, and Dr. Ferguson confessed that he was anxious. He would see the Camerons tomorrow. As a measure of precaution—"you understand me?"—he had at first refused the separate bedroom; now he, too, considered it essential.

"There can be no doubt that the mother's constant presence is injurious to Miss Cameron."

"But what should make her so inhuman to the girl? It has been a strain for both, of course; but what happened to-day was more than nerves. I assure you, Dr. Ferguson, it looked like intentional persecution. Yet surely such things cannot be?"

The doctor thought awhile; then said, "Persecution, yes; intentional persecution (in your sense), no. Do you happen to have read what is now being published here about Freud, a German scientist, and his theory of the 'suppressed wish'?"

Mrs. Wynne had not. He set it forth, rudimentarily—a subconscious motive, usually sexual in origin and sinister in aim, underlying the conscious will, and secretly inspiring the action. In certain conditions, it became the dominant impulse, potent above all others.

"That amiable old lady," he continued, and as Mrs. Wynne exclaimed, he sagely smiled. "As she appears, or appeared, to us to be, and in her own view still is. She knows nothing of the 'wish,' you must consider, either as a psychological theory or in herself—the wish in her case being to dominate, nay, humiliate, her daughter. You have perceived this in her, and may even, being a woman" (he bowed), "have diagnosed it correctly as jealousy: no rare thing, as doubtless you are aware, in a mother towards her daughter, though here it takes a somewhat unusual form. It was awakened, as I early saw, in Mrs. Cameron by her daughter's prominence during the Bergsma period."

"It sounds more devilish than ever," Mrs. Wynne exclaimed.

"You must remember that the state is pathological. To inhibit the 'wish' is not within the victim's competence, did she even know that it exists. A pitiable condition—and the more because it engenders dislike in all who witness its effects."

But Mrs. Wynne could feel no sense of mitigation; rather, the "Freudian wish," in its gaunt determinism, seemed to add despair to all the other ills.

"And the unhappy girl!" she cried. "Is she to be condemned to this, because a German scientist has an interesting psychological theory?"

He had an indulgent smile for her feminine unreason. "Most natural—in a woman, most natural. . . . But reflect that if the daughter's martyrdom can be explained, it is not thereby increased."

She groaned. "Explanations have a way of paralysing us, I think! What are you going to *do*?"

Dr. Ferguson stiffened a little. "What can be done, you may rest assured. The separate room, for example."

His tone annoyed her. "Is that the certain panacea?"

"We are struggling against an occult force in human nature, Mrs. Wynne," he said, more stiffly still.

"But we're not sure it's there; we have only this man's word for it!" And as he shrugged, she exclaimed, "I want to take Marion away from her."

"Do so, by all means, if you can compass it," Dr. Ferguson more cordially rejoined. "Meanwhile, I will ordain the lesser separation." His gesture was dismissive, and she rose.

At the door she turned. "To-morrow?"

"Without delay," the doctor promised, again somewhat stiffly.

But with the morning of the next day, very early, came the secretary of the Camerons' hotel to Mrs. Wynne, who, going out, met her upon the doorstep, and when she learnt who it was, drew her at once into the dining-room. The woman, with a horrible detached annoyance in her manner, told her news. Mrs. Cameron had found her daughter dead in bed at six o'clock that morning—in the same room with herself.

"*In the same room*, Mrs. Wynne, lying in streams of blood." The faded, worried eyes traversed Mrs. Wynne's room curiously, as she talked on. "Miss Cameron had cut open a vein in her arm, and bled to death. Such a state as everything was in—I needn't tell you!"

"It must have been," Mrs. Wynne heard herself inanely answer. She looked at the secretary; there was a kind of pity in her horror at the woman's callousness. She was so much the creature of her job that her blank face, if it could be said to wear any expression, wore only that of anger at the "state" of Marion's bedclothes and the carpet by the bed.

"And the talk and annoyance in the hotel—it's been bad enough without that; people leaving because of the old lady and her tempers. We all thought Miss Cameron would go out of her mind, three months ago, but she seemed better.

We were getting a separate bedroom ready for her yesterday, but Mrs. Cameron countermanded it. Well, she might have spared herself something, if she hadn't —not that it would have made much difference, I suppose. And of course there's any amount of trouble and annoyance before us—the inquest, and all the unpleasantness."

The inquest . . . of course there would have to be one. . . . How much could be kept back? Mrs. Wynne controlled her face and voice.

"I'll come over at once and see Mrs. Cameron," she said, though her soul fainted at thought of that interview.

"You won't find her. You wouldn't suppose that she'd be in and out of the house every minute, but that's what she is, and looking so queer with that cut on her face"—the secretary glanced at Mrs. Wynne as she said this—"that she got at tea-time yesterday."

The biscuit-plate—had either of the Camerons remembered to pick it up, or had a servant found it on the floor, so far from the tea-table? . . . Mrs. Wynne again controlled herself.

"That cut was nothing, I fancy; I remember noticing it yesterday afternoon. You say Mrs. Cameron won't be in?"

"She was out when I left, at Dr. Ferguson's; at least that's where she told the taxi to go—she had a taxi, that time. He was at the house this morning, of course; but she said she must see him again. Goodness knows why."

Even the gleam of curiosity was listless. Mrs. Wynne felt, with shuddering reassurance, that you could never fathom London's indifference.

"I'll wait, then; I won't go back with you to the hotel," she said.

"Mrs. Cameron spoke of you, this morning," the woman apathetically remarked.

"And said what?"

"It's not very pleasant to repeat, but perhaps I'd better. She said on no account to let *you* in."

"I was more Miss Cameron's friend than hers. It's odd, though," Mrs. Wynne returned, and hoped that she seemed only ordinarily troubled. "At such a time, however, one can't wonder at anything. . . . Is there nothing I can do to help in any way?"

"I don't think so." But the woman still sat, looking round the room, and Mrs. Wynne grew fidgety. She wanted her to go at once, that she herself might get to Dr. Ferguson's before Mrs. Cameron should leave him. No place could be so good to meet, and they would have to speak together, let her knowledge be resented as it might.

The secretary seemed to feel at last that they had finished. She rose, but then she paused, and spoke with eyes averted.

"I found the plate myself," she said, as impassively as before. "I happened to go into the drawing-room. I haven't mentioned it." She waited.

"The plate?" said Mrs. Wynne, in a strained voice of questioning.

The faded eyes met hers. "The biscuit-plate. It wasn't broken, fortunately. We may as well leave it out, if we have anything to say at the inquest. It would

be a nuisance, if. . . ." She drifted to the door. "You see, I have to think of my employers. People hate a scandal about a private hotel; it ruins business. You won't speak of it?"

"I don't know what you mean," Mrs. Wynne lied bravely.

The secretary looked at her again. "Something happened in the drawing-room," she went on, unmoved. "Any fool could see that—and *you* were there at the time. But it's just as well for me to know nothing about it, so don't tell me if I'm right."

With that, she opened the door at last; Mrs. Wynne went with her to the steps in a stunned silence.

As she drove to Dr. Ferguson's, Mrs. Wynne reflected on his theory. It, like the biscuit-plate, would have to be kept dark! Even in her grief, she smiled at a quick thought. The Freudian Wish—and the Bergsma visiting-card . . . but such ironic fellowships would be the very core, no doubt, of speculations in this kind. Was it another Wish that put the silly strip of pasteboard in its halfpenny envelope? And had Marion had one too—did *she* "wish" Bergsma to know what had been done? For, without the card, she would have had her separate room; those words would not have sounded: "I've never left you alone for a single instant, and I never intend to. . . ." Never alone from Mrs. Cameron, ridden by the Freudian Wish! A new burden had been bound upon humanity, if that frightful theory were true.

She was at once admitted at the doctor's, for she sent in her card. As she drew it from the case, she wondered if she ever should do that again without a shudder —and knew that she would, that this would pass as all things pass. . . . She entered the consulting-room—yes, Mrs. Cameron was there. Instantly the old woman sprang up, and stood defiant of her. But the doctor put his hand upon her arm.

"Keep quiet, Mrs. Cameron," he said, with stern decision. "Sit down, Mrs. Wynne."

Mrs. Wynne sat down. She felt horribly unpitying. Mrs. Cameron looked as usual—the pink face was a little pinker for the sticking-plaster on the cheek, which gave her a weird air of coquetry. Her mouth was quivering, but it looked more peevish than distressed. . . . And she had seen that sight, not many hours ago!

"Go on with what you were telling me," Dr. Ferguson said.

Still standing, with one hand on the table and her angry eyes on Mrs. Wynne, Mrs. Cameron obeyed eagerly, as if she trusted the man to be her friend against the woman. She had evidently been telling him about the visiting-card.

"I thought it seemed unnecessary, but *my* opinion was that Marion and I should call. I considered it my duty to uphold Marion's dignity."

She stopped, still fixing Mrs. Wynne with her malignant eyes.

Mrs. Wynne dropped hers before them. A coroner's jury would not have heard of Freud.

"Yes—your daughter's dignity?" Dr. Ferguson said, smoothly. His eyes met Mrs. Wynne's when she lifted her head again.